

The Battling Buckeyes of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

Research Thesis

Presented in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation *with research distinction* in history in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Tyler R. Webb

The Ohio State University

March 2018

Project Advisors: Dr. Peter Mansoor & Dr. David Steigerwald  
Department of History

### **The Battling Buckeyes of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

On September 3, 1945, Major General Robert Sprague Beightler stood with other American commanders at the High Commissioner's House in Baguio as General Tomoyuki Yamashita officially surrendered his forces.<sup>1</sup> For Beightler, the surrender was the culmination of a military career that began with the Ohio National Guard in 1911. To the GIs of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry "Buckeye" Division, Yamashita's surrender meant the mission was accomplished – the war that had devastated the world was over. It was a victory precipitated in part through their four years of warfare across the Pacific and meant that their fallen comrades' sacrifice was not in vain. Unfortunately, most of the men who began their journey to war with the division on October 15, 1940 were no longer present. Only one-third of the soldiers in the division had experienced any combat with the unit when it returned to the United States.<sup>2</sup> Many had been wounded and transferred to other organizations or invalided out of the service. Some had acquired enough "points" to rotate home ahead of the division. Others had given their lives in New Georgia, Bougainville, and the Philippines. The citizen soldiers of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry "Buckeye" Division won their achievements because of a special bond with one another, the National Guard, and the state of Ohio.

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that was forged during the fires of World War I was again called upon by its nation after December 7, 1941. It was known as the "Buckeye" Division because its original constituents were from the Ohio National Guard. When the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry

---

<sup>1</sup> John Kennedy Ohl, *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, (*N.D.*), Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, Ohio Historical Society (Columbus, Ohio), chapter 44, 1.

Division arrived in Fiji in 1942 it was made up of 44 percent Ohioans.<sup>3</sup> Beightler was proud of the division's Ohio heritage and constantly reminded his men of it. This legacy served as a source of pride throughout the grueling Pacific war. As one infantryman described it, "the only thing we claim is that we are always conscious that we were carrying the banner for the great State of Ohio and if we failed it would be felt in the heart of Ohio and if we succeeded, well, the folks back home would be mighty proud."<sup>4</sup> Beightler maintained the division's bond with its Ohio and National Guard origins even as replacements from other states and the Regular Army filled the ranks. This bond inspired the division as it left the homeland to fight an enemy that had been at war for several years.

The Buckeyes were a critical component of the American forces that defeated Japan and proved the capabilities of National Guard units when properly led. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was successful because of Beightler's leadership and the comradery of the officers and soldiers as they overcame tensions between the Regular Army and National Guard while fighting a capable foe in the Imperial Japanese Army.

### **Federalization and the Road to War**

On October 15, 1940, Henry L. Stimson, U.S. Secretary of War, officially activated the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division into active federal military service.<sup>5</sup> The men originally prepared to depart for Camp Shelby, Mississippi, under the command Major General Glenson D. Light. General Beightler only assumed command of the division after Light failed to pass the new physical tests enacted on the guardsmen by the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. John

---

<sup>3</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 9, chapter 2, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>5</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 3, 1.

Bricker, the Governor of Ohio, selected Beightler for the vacancy largely because he knew Beightler from his time as Ohio's chief engineer in the highway department. Additionally, Beightler had stellar military experience, was in exceptional physical condition, and was only forty-eight years old.

Beightler, a Marysville, Ohio native, was a businessman and engineer before commanding the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. However, his experience as a National Guardsman shaped his character and transcended his civilian pursuits. His military experience was earned in part by combat in World War I, his legacy came from his ancestor Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, and his education was both civilian and military – he was an Ohio State University graduate and was the top of his Army War College class in 1926.<sup>6</sup> Beightler only surpassed his passion for the National Guard by his admiration and care for the men who served in the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

The lengthy journey to Camp Shelby marked the first time below the Mason-Dixon Line for many of the men in the division. The Buckeyes arrived only to find the camp in pitiful condition. The task to finish the camp was so immense that 10,276 civilian workers were employed to aid in completing the facilities.<sup>7</sup> Thus the first task at hand for the Buckeyes was not to commence training, but to slosh into the thick Mississippi mud in the blazing southern heat with axes and shovels to create their new home.

The bond between Beightler, also known as Uncle Bob or the soldier's soldier, and his men was evident immediately. Beightler did not sit; he spent as much time with his soldiers as

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustrations, *Soldier's Soldier*.

<sup>7</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 9, chapter 3, 6.

possible. Men from an engineer platoon figured this out quickly as they argued who would cross a river to retrieve a wire. They then witnessed an officer jump in the water to retrieve it, only to be “amazed to see their General climb up on the bank.”<sup>8</sup> Beightler maintained a mindset based on critically evaluating errors rather than snapping into anger when his men faltered in training. He drilled his men constantly and had the highest expectations for them, his main purpose was to reduce the number of coffins filled by inadequately trained soldiers. Beightler’s decision to give a private an honorable discharge so he could go home to feed his wife and two children rather than court martial him for desertion as he snuck away from camp to work a second job embodied his compassion for his men. The division chief of staff, Colonel Charles Craig, best summarized Beightler: “He’s vitally immersed in every man in this Division.”<sup>9</sup> These bonds helped carry the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division through the war, but at Camp Shelby they were needed to carry on training.

Beightler’s design to assign selectees to companies based on their hometowns also fostered close bonds among the men. His hope was that this policy would build “regimental personality out of common experiences and traditions by drawing upon the men’s civilian as well as military background.”<sup>10</sup> The integration of selectees and replacements proved to be a strength of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division throughout the war.

Once Camp Shelby was suitable for military training, other problems became apparent. There was a significant lack of real weaponry, so the men relied on dummy alternatives in their initial training. This was especially troublesome for the artillery units because there were only

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustrations, *Soldier’s Soldier*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 4, 7.

four 75mm cannons and twelve 37mm anti-tank guns available, along with a few dozen mortars.<sup>11</sup> Beightler continued their training regardless and instilled discipline and pride in his citizen soldiers. The strong performance of the 37<sup>th</sup> in its training was best exemplified by the fact that in mid-January 1941 Major General Campbell Hodges, Commanding General 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Area, and Lieutenant General Herbert Bress, Commander 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, allowed the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to progress to a new stage in their training.<sup>12</sup> This achievement was a relatively rare occurrence among the newly federalized National Guard Units, most of which had to repeat the thirteen week basic training program.<sup>13</sup> In late January 1941 the first draftees were assigned to the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the product of the first peacetime draft ever instituted in the United States.

The pace of training increased in June with large maneuvers conducted with the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry “Cyclone” Division. These larger maneuvers provided officers with valuable field command experience that emphasized effective communication and coordination. The constant rain that accompanied these maneuvers turned the Mississippi mud into ubiquitous ooze. As Technical Sergeant Charles Joe observed, “I know a lot of guys who started growing webs between their toes.”<sup>14</sup> These dismal conditions offered the GIs a small preview of what war in the Pacific would entail. Buckeye veterans recalled after the war that “New Georgia, of course, was worse, but at the time we never thought that we would see anything as bad as that damn brown mud of Louisiana.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 9, chapter 3, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> One especially successful element of the division was the 112<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, which at one point constructed a 279 foot bridge in only eleven minutes. However, the 112<sup>th</sup> was reassigned to the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division when the war began and was destined to fight in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately for the Buckeyes, the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, attached in June 1942, proved to be an adequate replacement.

<sup>14</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 5, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.

July 1941 witnessed a significant influx of real weaponry into the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, including 105mm howitzers, machine guns, small arms, tanks, and a significant number of tank destroyers. The training pace of U.S. forces increased after more divisions completed basic training and became ready for corps and army level maneuvers. Throughout August and September 1941, 555,000 personnel from the Second and Third Armies assembled in Gillis, Louisiana, for large-scale maneuvers. The high point of the exercise for the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, part of the Third Army, was when the 112<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion fixed an impassable road leading to the capture of 500 vehicles and the severing of the opposition forces' supply line.<sup>16</sup> These maneuvers gave the men some practical experience in field operations and allowed them to realize their capabilities to endure hardships and succeed. Beightler was very critical of any mistakes he found in his division's performance, errors ranging from salutes and uniforms to maneuvers and artillery precision. He believed every member of the division, no matter how experienced, should constantly seek improvement. He held his officers to an even higher standard, which was reflected in his remarks to them that "for it would be a tragedy indeed, and a betrayal of the sacrifice these men are making, to fail them now."<sup>17</sup>

Long marches, terrible weather, and the looming end of the one-year mobilization period in October took their toll on morale as men began to wonder why they were doing all of this training for a war that was half a world away. The slogan "OHIO," or Over the Hill in October, became common, although the division veterans claim they did not create the phrase. When Beightler was asked about the division's morale he responded "Morale! Look here, when you know you're in the best damn division in the army... well, then you've got morale."<sup>18</sup> Despite

---

<sup>16</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 7, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File, 6, Post-Maneuver Evaluation.

<sup>18</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustrations *Soldier's Soldier*.

these conditions, Beightler continued to challenge his men and thrust them from the world of civilians into that of soldiers, all while forging his own bond with the division.

The National Guardsmen would not go home in October. The War Department instead enacted an eighteen-month extension, which became indefinite once the nation was at war. The War Department also enacted new age restrictions for officers, which resulted in the dismissal or retirement of thirty-four officers in the division. Beightler emphasized specialized training in intelligence, anti-tank defense, and other areas. The men would need the training, for unbeknownst to them, the United States would soon be at war.

On December 7, 1941, Camp Shelby was essentially deserted, with most men on extended furlough for the Christmas holidays. As radio reports of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor filled the airwaves, men were immediately recalled. U.S. and Japanese forces were already fighting half a world away when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt requested a declaration of war against Imperial Japan on December 8, and Germany declared war several days later on the United States. As the men digested this new reality, their new obsession became figuring out where they would be deployed. The reality of war only made Beightler, a World War I veteran, more concerned. He stated: "This Division is good but it is not good enough for what faces us."<sup>19</sup> What faced the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was a world war that the Allies were losing. In the Pacific the Japanese captured Singapore and assaulted the Gilbert, Marshall, and Philippine Islands, while Rommel's Africa Corps was pushing British forces back in Libya and Egypt and the Germans were at the gates of Moscow.

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 6, Talk to Officers and NCOs on December 9, 1941.



By the time the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had been training for approximately one year, having been activated on October 15, 1940 in the wake of the national security crisis occasioned by the fall of France. The division performed well in this training; however, this single year could not provide a comparable experience to that of the battle-tested Imperial Japanese Army. Most of the forces facing the Buckeyes had fought in Japan's aggressive military expansion as it attempted to create a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Some of the most notable adversaries were the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on Bougainville, responsible for the Nanking Massacre, and General Yamashita. Yamashita, who would command the 14<sup>th</sup> Area Army on Luzon during the U.S. invasion of the Philippines, earned the title of "Tiger of Malaya" for his crushing defeat of Allied, principally British and Indian, forces in Malaya and Singapore in 1942.<sup>20</sup> However, Beightler was an exceptional commander in his own right, one who prepared his men for the imposing task ahead and selected capable officers to lead them.

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was originally supposed to be part of a force to relieve U.S. forces in the Philippines. This plan was quickly discarded because it was simply impractical based on the situation – just as War Plan Orange designers feared.<sup>21</sup> Rumors surged in the division that they were to be sent to Ireland. Instead, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would fight its battles in the Pacific after the Arcadia Conference in early January 1942. Japan was rapidly progressing southward, capturing the Solomon Islands and enhancing the threat to New Zealand and Australia. The 147<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was detached from the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and sent to Tonga, an island on the southeastern coast of Fiji.

---

<sup>20</sup> Murray, Williamson, and Allan, Millet. *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001. (173)

<sup>21</sup> Miller, Edward S. *War Plan Orange: the US strategy to defeat Japan, 1897-1945*. Annapolis: Md., 2007. (53-54)

Thus the recently triangularized<sup>22</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, as of January 16, was left with only two infantry regiments.<sup>23</sup> It was not until after the division's combat on New Georgia that it received a replacement, the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Nevertheless, the Buckeyes departed on May 26, 1942, from San Francisco for Fiji as part of Task Force 6429.<sup>24</sup>

The Joint Chiefs of Staff deemed Fiji a point at which the Japanese advance must be halted. If Fiji fell then American ability to retaliate and effectively ship supplies and troops to Australia and New Zealand would have been greatly compromised. The main island in Fiji, Viti Levu, was where most of the division resided in 1942. The elements of the division that landed on New Zealand assisted in training the New Zealand Home Units, guarded important areas, and manned defensive positions. The occupation of Fiji was more intensive because the island lacked a significant defensive infrastructure. In the event of Japanese attack the division was ordered to hold Fiji at all costs.

Beightler used the ten months on Fiji and New Zealand to conduct training in Pacific conditions focused on combating Japanese tactics. Fiji had a diverse geography with features ranging from mangrove swamps to rainforests, harboring all of the many discomforts of the tropical battlefields to come. Additionally, the division spent significant time interacting with Fiji natives, who provided the soldiers with lessons of jungle survival and a bond to Fijians who helped them fight in the Solomon Islands campaign. Fijians served in many capacities with the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division throughout Operation Cartwheel, the Solomon's campaign. However, the training on Fiji did not provide a skilled foe to provide the GIs with actual combat experience.

---

<sup>22</sup> Prior to World War II, U.S. divisions were of a square configuration with four infantry regiments. Early in the war the infantry division structure was altered to a "triangle" structure with three infantry regiments and a general overall restructuring. The purpose was to create a more mobile force compared to that of a square division.

<sup>23</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 2, General Orders, 1941-1945, January 31, 1942, General Order No. 2.

<sup>24</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 11, chapter 10, 11.

The division history recalls that “there were no Japs (sic) on Fiji, and no large American cemeteries where the 37<sup>th</sup> bade goodbyes to its buddies.”<sup>25</sup>

The next stop for the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was Guadalcanal, which had been seized after a fierce campaign that began on August 7, 1942. Although the Japanese ground forces on Guadalcanal had been defeated, the war was closer now than ever to the Buckeyes. This reality became evident on their first night ashore, when five Japanese planes bombarded Henderson Airfield. The danger was minimal, no casualties were suffered, but the NCOs had to jokingly tell their men digging their foxholes too deep that “one more shovelful and you’re AWOL.”<sup>26</sup> Beightler combated the disparity in experience through constant training whenever possible prior to the division’s first combat action in New Georgia. The close proximity to combat operations meant that there was now an incredible amount of supplies available to the 37<sup>th</sup>. Beightler utilized the immense amount of shells to endlessly drill his artillery battalions. He also focused training on small unit tactics, landing operations, and beachhead establishment. Just as on Fiji, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on Guadalcanal did not contact Japanese forces and thus remained an untested division. This was about to change.

Following the U.S. success at the Battle of Midway, Major General Richard Sutherland, General MacArthur’s chief of staff, put forth MacArthur’s plan to seize Rabaul. This plan was ultimately the final phase of a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive—Operation CARTWHEEL—that also entailed offensives against portions of New Guinea and up the Solomon Islands chain. Rabaul was a major Japanese base located on the island of New Britain.<sup>27</sup> The first steps toward seizing this redoubt were complete after the victories on Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon

---

<sup>25</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 12, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., chapter 13, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Spector, Ronald H. *Eagle Against the Sun: the American War with Japan*. Riverside: Free Press, 2012, 185-188.

Islands, but the island still remained out of range of American land-based airpower. MacArthur's plan consisted of several phases, beginning with the establishment of airfields on New Georgia. The training that began at Camp Shelby, where Beightler set high standards for his soldiers, would soon be tested.

### **New Georgia: Welcome to War**

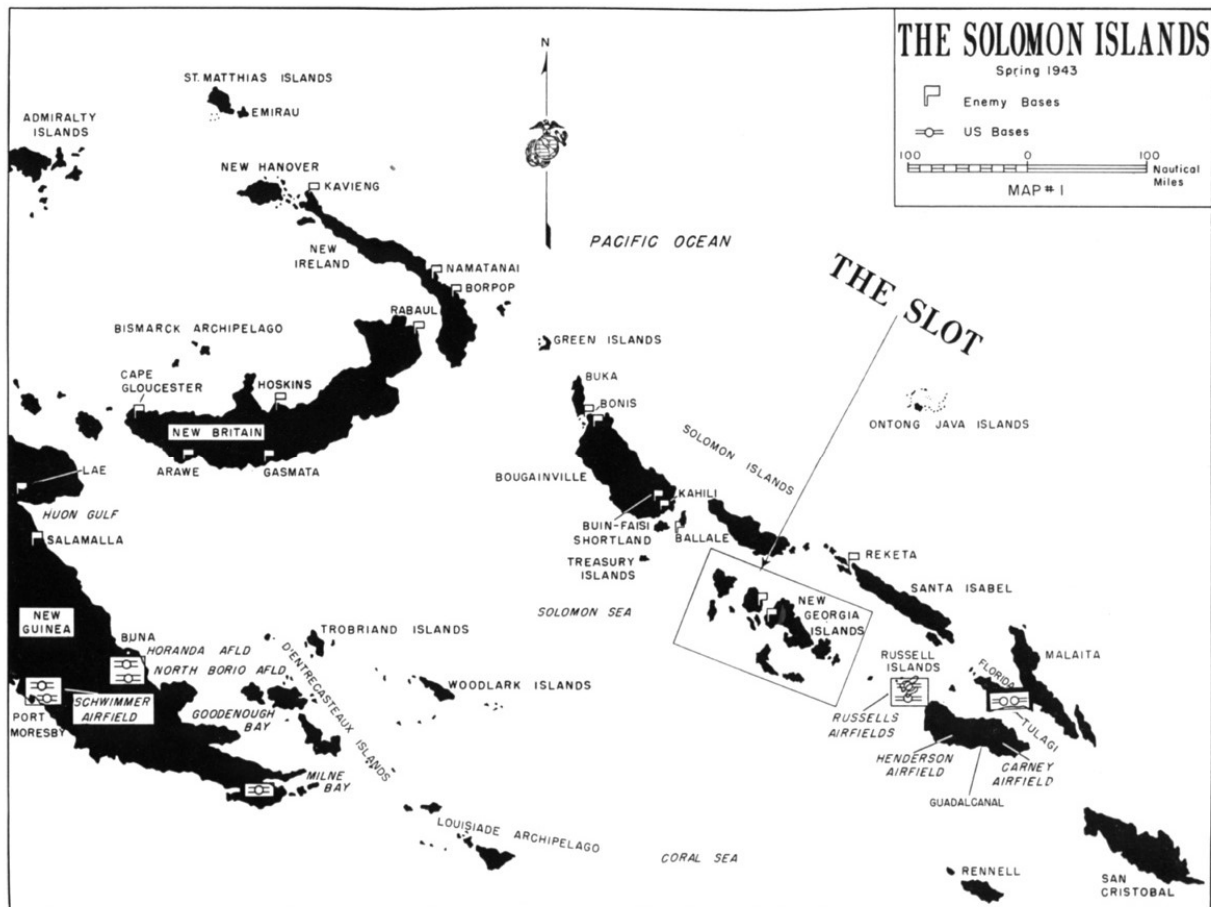
The island of New Georgia consisted of dense jungles, overgrowth, and thick mud similar to that of Camp Shelby. New Georgia, in the scheme of Operation CARTWHEEL, was important because it was the prerequisite to the seizure of Bougainville, which would then put American aircraft within range of Rabaul. Admiral William Halsey led the invasion of New Georgia, with the primary objective the seizure of Munda Airfield.<sup>28</sup> The Japanese 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, as well as other smaller units, awaited the Americans on New Georgia.<sup>29</sup> The action of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on New Georgia consisted of two separate operations. The first of these entailed the attachment of two battalions from the 145<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion at Rice Anchorage. The second operation, the main one, occurred when the 37<sup>th</sup> was pulled from reserve to assist the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division at Zanana Beach.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 233.

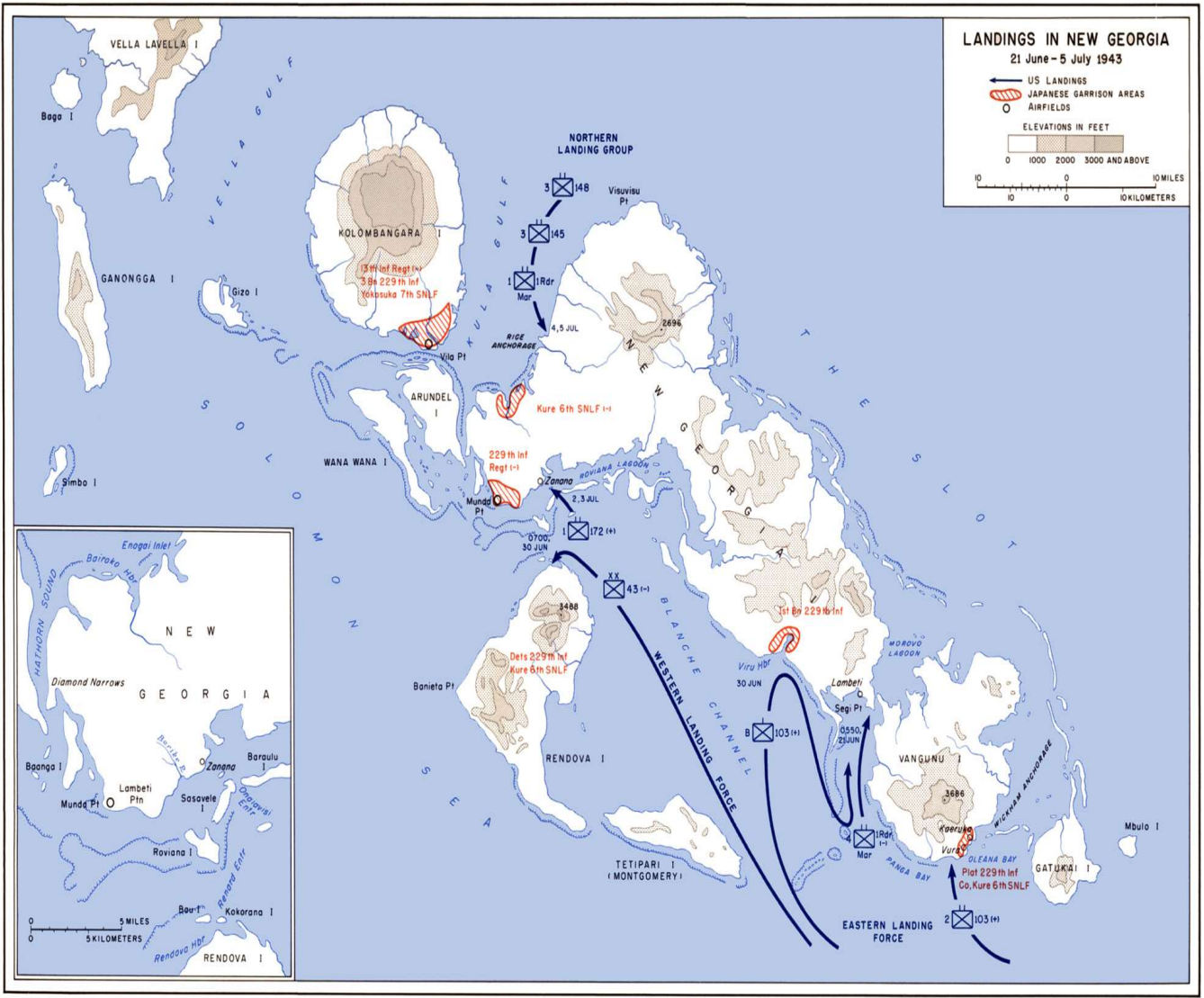
<sup>29</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 11, chapter 16, 80.

<sup>30</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 14, pages 1-3.



The Solomon Islands (Rabaul is on the eastern coast of New Britain)<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Major John Rentz, "Solomon Islands Geography," HyperWar: USMC Monograph--Marines in the Central Solomons. Accessed February 13, 2018.



*F. Temple*

The Invasion of New Georgia: Operation Toenails<sup>32</sup>

The role of the landing force at Rice Anchorage was to prevent the landing of Japanese reinforcements, thereby isolating Japanese forces on New Georgia. This strategy was adopted because of the American experience on Guadalcanal, where the Japanese were able to reinforce

<sup>32</sup> John Miller, “TOENAILS: The Landings in New Georgia.” HyperWar: US Army in WWII: CARTWHEEL--The Reduction of Rabaul. Accessed February 13, 2018.

their garrison with two divisions during the course of the fighting.<sup>33</sup> The objectives for this task force were to secure Rice Anchorage and Enogai Inlet, to establish blockades along the Munda-Bairoko trail, and eventually to seize Bairoko Harbor. The Munda-Bairoko trail was the artery that allowed for the Japanese to move troops and supplies around New Georgia. The American force, under the command of Marine Colonel Harry Liversedge, landed at Rice Anchorage in Kula Gulf on July 5, 1943, under a flurry of Japanese artillery fire. Thus elements of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division entered combat for the first time in the absence of Major General Beightler. This action displayed the effectiveness of the training Beightler put his men through and that the National Guard forces were capable of facing up to the more battle-tested Japanese.

The Marines and Guardsmen were able to advance relatively quickly because the Japanese had positioned the majority of their defensive positions south of Rice Anchorage. Difficulties still emerged as Company L and several platoons from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment landed 3000 yards off-target to the south.<sup>34</sup> The scattered force proceeded through enemy lines for two days before reaching Rice Anchorage. Colonel Liversedge assigned the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion and Companies K and L from the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to take Enogai Inlet, the remainder of the regiment to secure Rice Anchorage, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry to establish roadblocks on the Munda-Bairoko junction and Rice Anchorage-Munda trails.<sup>35</sup> These roadblocks were critical because they forced the Japanese to use water routes for supply and troop movement, thus exposing them to American air and naval firepower. A few days after landing a patrol from the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment killed two Japanese soldiers near the Little Bairoko River. The Buckeye Division was now officially in the war.

---

<sup>33</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 11, chapter 15, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 5.

The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment established a roadblock without contest from the Japanese, who were completely surprised after an entire food supply mission was destroyed when it ran into the American position. However, once the blockade was discovered the Japanese immediately set out to destroy it and inflicted the first combat casualty on a soldier in the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Private William Kuckne, Company I, provided covering fire for the other eleven men from their forward outpost to retreat back to the main roadblock. When American forces reclaimed the outpost two days later they found Kuckne among four slain Japanese soldiers.<sup>36</sup> A major banzai attack by the Japanese on July 10 managed to reach the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's command post, but a counterattack led by Captain Vernon McMillian pushed the Japanese back.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the action New Georgians and Fijians evacuated twenty-eight wounded Americans. The island natives and Fijians greatly assisted the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division through their service as guides, supply runners, stretcher bearers, and more.

The situation at the roadblock became dire as increasing casualties were combined with depleted food stores and medical units ran out of supplies to treat the wounded. The position became known to the Buckeyes as "Starvation Ridge," with rations down to one-eighteenth of a K-ration by July 14.<sup>38</sup> Back at Rice Anchorage, the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry was not faring much better because of Japanese artillery and A6M "Zeros" from Munda Airfield constantly pounded its positions. Luckily for the Americans the Marine Raiders and Companies K and L of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were making progress in their push on Enogai Inlet. They captured the village of Triri, a fortified Japanese position. Captain Clifford Morrow received a Silver Star for

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.



exposing himself to enemy fire to retrieve the wounded commander of Company K and a marine officer.<sup>39</sup>

After seizing the village, Liversedge withdrew his forces from the Munda-Bairoko roadblock because of significant supply shortages. Several attempts were made to advance on Bairoko Harbor, but the Japanese defense inflicted severe enough losses that the Americans had to be content with a defensive posture and the reestablishment of the roadblock.<sup>40</sup> Welcome news of the seizure of Munda Airfield, the task of the remainder of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, reached the Rice Anchorage force, and they then assaulted Bairoko Harbor, only to find the Japanese had abandoned it.

While the force at Rice Anchorage performed its duties, the majority of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was pulled from reserve by Major General Oscar Griswold, Commander of XIV Corps, shortly after the battle commenced. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division found itself on a vulnerable 4,000 yard front extending from the Zanana landing site.<sup>41</sup> The 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, a New England National Guard division, had difficulties when it entered combat and failed to take Munda Airfield. Additionally, the division faltered in its defense of the Kokorana area. General Griswold stated that the division seemed as though it was “about to fold up” as battle fatigue took more of a toll than physical wounds.<sup>42</sup> The 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment suffered severe casualties and was relieved by the Buckeye 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, minus its 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion with the marines at Rice Anchorage. Colonel Temple G. Holland, commanding officer of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, also became the commander of the remnants of the 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>41</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 12, chapter 16, pages 4-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Eagle Against the Sun*, 236.

The soldiers of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment discovered a pitiful situation upon contacting the 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Enemy infiltrations and roadblocks were ubiquitous, and elements of the 118<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion with their casualties were surrounded at the Barike River. A breakout was successful, but when the position was retaken several days later the GIs discovered the tortured corpses of those Americans who did not survive the retreat. This infuriated the Buckeyes, and one infantryman stated that “No holds were barred.” “All was fair” was his brief (and accurate) assessment of the Pacific War.<sup>43</sup>

The artillery of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division performed well on July 17 when the Japanese threatened to overrun the supply depot for the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and elements of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. The 136<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery maintained its shelling throughout the night, which led Brigadier General Barker, commanding the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division Artillery, to visit the unit and personally thank them for “saving his life.”<sup>44</sup> Despite the artillery fire, the Japanese maintained constant pressure on the supply positions of the American forces and inflicted significant casualties.

The bulk of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Stuart Baxter, landed at Zanana Beach where rows of wounded GIs welcomed them to the war. The regiment advanced to relieve the northern flank of the 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, but the defensive line was so porous that the Japanese easily infiltrated the American positions. The Japanese inserted small forces that ambushed the GIs with sniper rifles and Nambu machine guns. In one instance the majority of a company of mortar-men were killed; in another a regimental supply dump lost a significant amount of supplies.<sup>45</sup> Major General Beightler assumed command during this debacle and

---

<sup>43</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 11, chapter 15, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., chapter 16, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 55.

immediately sought to solidify his lines. He positioned his four field artillery battalions on the adjacent islands of Roviana and Sasavale.<sup>46</sup> He also sought to withdraw his forces from forward positions to shorten the lengthy American perimeter.

Colonel Baxter disobeyed Beightler's command by pushing his men beyond the designated perimeter. This put his entire regiment out of position and created a salient in the American line. The Japanese exploited the gap and 200 Japanese soldiers infiltrated into the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's lines.<sup>47</sup> Beightler emphasized that his regiments must tie in their flanks and was infuriated when Baxter lost contact with the 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. The bravery of Baxter's men was the only solution to his poor decision-making. On July 31, 1943, Private Rodger Young, Company B, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, saved his pinned comrades.<sup>48</sup> A Japanese machine gun slowed the advance of Companies G and B and immobilized Young's platoon. As day faded into night Young decided to take action. He exposed himself to advance on the enemy position and was hit by two bursts of machine gun fire. He then stood up, completely exposing himself, and threw his grenades into the Japanese position as a final burst killed him. Young's bravery allowed his comrades to withdraw into the safety of American lines. His actions were immortalized in song and his sacrifice earned him the Medal of Honor. The ballad proudly relates: "No, they've got no time for glory in the Infantry, no they've got no use for praises loudly sung, but in every soldier's heart in all the Infantry, shines the name, shines the name of Rodger Young."<sup>49</sup> Young's actions were the inspiration for the name of a troop transport in Robert Heinlein's acclaimed science fiction novel *Starship Troopers*.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>47</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 115.

<sup>48</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 12, Awards, Medal of Honor Citations, 1943-1946, Official Medal of Honor Citation for Private Rodger W. Young.

<sup>49</sup> "Loesser writes for Infantry," *LIFE* magazine, March 5, 1945, 117.

The Americans eventually reconsolidated their lines. After the battle Beightler relieved Baxter of his command; however, Beightler had several other problems to solve as well. Untested artillery forward observers struggled to distinguish targets in the dense overgrowth and the topographical maps of the area were unreliable at best. Additionally, Japanese commanders quickly realized they lacked sufficient artillery to confront American counter-battery fire. Once the American artillery commenced its shelling, the Japanese fired sporadically into American lines. The Americans occasionally called off their artillery because they believed they were firing short and inflicting friendly casualties.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commenced its first major offensive against Bibolo Hill on August 2, the last high ground before reaching Munda Airfield. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division attacked the left flank of the hill while the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was tasked with attacking the right flank. Beightler used the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to guard his northern flank while the 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment engaged the Japanese pillboxes. When progress slowed, Beightler called on his artillery and naval guns to eliminate enemy positions and displayed his belief (and American tactical practice) in using massive firepower before he risked the lives of his men. With Bibolo Hill secured, the primary objective of Munda Airfield was now becoming increasingly vulnerable.

The Americans found that the most significant obstacle in seizing Munda Airfield was an elevated area known as Horseshoe Hill, which was preventing advances from the east of the airfield. Beightler subsequently tasked Colonel Temple Holland's 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to take it. A well dug-in Japanese battalion with interlocking fields of fire on the high ground awaited them. Progress was slow, costly, and often only came from the sacrifice of a lone infantrymen with a flamethrower or explosives. Vicious hand-to-hand combat occurred

---

<sup>50</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 11, chapter 16, pages 31-32.

frequently in the desperate struggle to hold any ground taken against determined Japanese counterattacks. The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment seized a significant portion of Horseshoe Hill by July 28, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was dug in only 35 yards from the Japanese fortifications. The price for this progress—178 killed and wounded—was high, forcing Beightler to reinforce the fighting with elements of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

On the evening of July 31, Beightler decided that Horseshoe Hill was weak enough to launch a final assault. His exhausted men were short on water and casualties were climbing. The previous day the Japanese launched a major banzai attack in an attempt to retake the hill, but suffered severe casualties and were forced to withdraw. The following morning the GIs formed a skirmish line, lobbed several grenades, and commenced a bayonet charge against the remainder of the Japanese soldiers. The division suffered 128 wounded but finally seized the hill. The Japanese began their retreat only to find that the Munda-Bairoko trail was blocked by the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Raider Battalion and battalions from the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. With the fall of Horseshoe Hill the Japanese essentially lost Munda Airfield. For the Buckeye Division, the battle resulted in more than 200 killed and 1,000 wounded.<sup>51</sup>

On July 25 the 5 inch guns of destroyers offshore and bombs from B-24 Liberators pummeled Japanese defenses on the airfield. However, the GIs quickly learned that a thorough preemptive bombardment does not result in the complete destruction of the enemy. The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment moved rapidly in the initial assault but were soon pinned down by stout Japanese fortifications. Several tanks and specialty weapons such as

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 78.

flamethrowers destroyed fourteen Japanese pillboxes.<sup>52</sup> The airfield fell with relative ease after the pillboxes were silenced.

The effects of combat were molding the citizen soldiers of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division into experienced veterans. The GIs no longer “talked, laughed, or made any variety of noise” at night, and several men began to suffer from traumatic nightmares as casualties mounted.<sup>53</sup> The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion was especially prone to high casualties because the bulldozers at this point in the war offered no protection and the Japanese specifically targeted them to delay American advances. The engineers were aware of their vulnerability but carried out their duty to clear jungle paths for supply columns and other traffic. A letter from an engineer officer to a family that lost their son while he was operating a bulldozer read: “The dozer (sic) made enough noise to bring the Jap (sic) army to his scene of operations. And he knew it, but kept on pushing the jungles back, yard by yard.”<sup>54</sup>

On August 13 the Buckeyes witnessed the rewarding sight of American aircraft landing on Munda Airfield, while the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion created roadways and buildings. This step to Rabaul was complete; the New Georgia garrison was beaten. The division was reorganized at the conclusion of the campaign. The 161<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment was detached from the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was assigned in its place for the duration of the war.

The officers Beightler had selected proved to be mostly capable. Beightler’s confidence in them was reflected in his remark before the battle that “it takes a lot of hard work and weeding out of inferior officers [to get a division ready for combat] but the job has now been

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 42.

accomplished.”<sup>55</sup> However, Beightler was faced with the challenge of resolving command issues, with the most important being the need to replace Colonel Baxter. Beightler choose Colonel Lawrence White to take command of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. White was a 1933 West Point graduate, an experienced regimental commander, and had served in Beightler’s G-3 section during the battle.<sup>56</sup> White’s appointment reflected Beightler’s desire to have competent leaders above all else, even if it meant disregarding the lack of Ohio and National Guard roots. However, he maintained the division’s Ohio heritage with the appointment of Colonel Cecil Whitcomb as the new commander of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Major General Griswold had pulled the regiment’s previous commander, Colonel Temple Holland, and sent him to take command of the 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. Whitcomb was a World War I veteran and a member of the Ohio National Guard since 1922.

Beightler also displayed an ability to quell tensions between the Regular Army and the National Guard during the New Georgia campaign. The first encounter arose when Major General Joseph Collins, commanding the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, attempted to micromanage the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Collins, a West Point graduate, was not in favor of National Guard officers commanding divisions. This sentiment was shared by Brigadier General Charles Craig, the 37<sup>th</sup> Assistant Division Commander and a Regular Army veteran, who vocalized his belief that Guardsmen should be content with battalion command. However, Beightler appreciated Craig’s talent and willingness to critically analyze situations. After Beightler confronted him

---

<sup>55</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 108.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

Craig improved his attitude and served with Beightler throughout the war. Beightler eventually recommended Craig's promotion to major general.<sup>57</sup>

A critical component of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's victory on New Georgia was the performance of its auxiliary units. The engineer, medical, signal, and other outfits performed well under fire. The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion kept the jungle at bay while signal units kept communications flowing. Two examples of the performance of the 112<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion come from the surgeons and a regimental dentist. Surgeons operated constantly to attempt to save wounded GIs. Their dedication was observed even during air raids in which "all but surgeons find shelter."<sup>58</sup> Captain William Welker, a Regimental Dentist, reacted calmly to two Japanese mortar shells that failed to explode while he was performing surgery with the remark "damn poor workmanship."<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had a very low rate of malaria as the disease, along with a multitude of other ailments, ravaged American divisions across the Pacific. Ultimately the Buckeyes had one of the lowest malaria rates of any division in the Pacific; illnesses rarely exceeded 0.3 to 0.4 percent of the division.<sup>60</sup> This shows the leadership and discipline of the organization, as preventing malarial outbreaks was a function of ensuring soldiers took their Atabrine tablets, a prophylactic drug that targets malarial parasites. This was easier said than done, as untrue rumors swept the GI ranks in the Southwest Pacific that the drug made one impotent.

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division demonstrated exceptional combat effectiveness for a completely untested organization. Its performance helped salvage the reputation of the National

---

<sup>57</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 19, Efficiency Reports (promotions), July 1943-August 1945, Promotion of Charles Chair and Leo Kreber.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>60</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 13, 10.



Guard on New Georgia after the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division had faltered. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division received high praise from a number of senior commanders and Beightler earned a Distinguished Service Medal for his actions as well. The soldiers were supposed to receive rest, but Major General Millard Harmon, the Commanding General of U.S. Army Forces in the South Pacific Area, had other plans for the division, which he described in a letter to Beightler: “Now with but a short breather you go into another operation. Your division was chosen for this task partly because of its availability but largely because of its demonstrated effectiveness in New Georgia. I recently noted the mental and physical preparedness of the personnel of all echelons to undertake this new task.”<sup>61</sup> The GIs of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division prepared to again enter the fray.

### **Bougainville: Onward to Rabaul**

After seizing New Georgia, the U.S. military now had land-based aircraft within range of Bougainville, the next target in Operation CARTWHEEL. Admiral Halsey, commander of the South Pacific Area, assumed command of the Bougainville operation. The premise of the operation was for an amphibious force to land at Cape Torokina in Empress Augusta Bay and to establish a perimeter for the construction of airfields.<sup>62</sup> Admiral Halsey originally intended to use the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. However, that division was depleted from combat on Guadalcanal and New Georgia, which resulted in the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division taking its place.<sup>63</sup>

The American strategy never entailed seizing all of Bougainville. The Japanese Seventeenth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Haruyoshi Hyakutake, consisted of

---

<sup>61</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 12, Awards, Medal of Honor Citations, 1943-1946, November 1, 1943, Letter to Beightler from Harmon.

<sup>62</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Harry A. Gailey, *Bougainville, 1943-1945: The Forgotten Campaign* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991). (33)

approximately 37,500 soldiers.<sup>64</sup> The vast majority of these forces were concentrated towards the southern tip of Bougainville because the Japanese deemed that location to be the most probable site for an American amphibious landing. Instead, Halsey had the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division spearhead the assault at Empress Augusta Bay. This site was geographically less favorable than the southern portion of the island; however, it was comparatively more weakly held. The Terokina Guard Unit consisted of only 500-700 soldiers and lacked substantial fortifications.<sup>65</sup>

The Marines commenced the assault on November 1, 1943, after an intensive pre-invasion naval and aerial bombardment. The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division the following day, and essentially all of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was on Bougainville by November 19.<sup>66</sup> The first encounter the GIs of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had with the Japanese on Bougainville was on November 9 when a patrol from the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment encountered a Japanese suicide battalion.<sup>67</sup> The division took up position in the western part of the beachhead, began to expand the perimeter, and awaited the inevitable Japanese counterattack.

The 37<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop completed the important task of long range patrols during the initial phase of the Bougainville operation by extensively mapping the poorly known terrain. On one patrol the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon encountered three heavy Japanese machine guns and sporadic mortar fire as they reached the top of a plateaued area. Heavily outnumbered, the GIs held out for three hours until reinforced by the remainder of the troop.<sup>68</sup> Their intelligence proved to be critically important to the eventual American defense of Hill 700 by providing artillery battalions

---

<sup>64</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 125.

<sup>65</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 12, chapter 17, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 12, chapter 18, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

with improved knowledge of the terrain. The 37<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop was later awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for mapping 270 miles of jungle trail up to 25 miles behind Japanese lines on Bougainville.<sup>69</sup>

Japanese resistance was relatively light throughout the month, and by November 25 the airfields were under construction. The division's artillery battalions provided direct, neutralizing, and counter-battery fire for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, which was encountering stronger resistance.<sup>70</sup> During this relatively light period of action, the Buckeyes learned valuable lessons from Fijians assisting them on the island. The Fijian remedy for the painful bug bites was to open a small wound with a machete and simply pour water down the blade.<sup>71</sup> Apparently, this was more effective than any treatment the medics could offer the soldiers. It was also during this time that the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion constructed numerous bridges and roads that were essential to the division's success in the upcoming action. From November 1943 to February 1944, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division encountered only sporadic resistance on the ground. The most significant nuisance was Japanese air raids launched from Rabaul. Although these raids were ineffective they were numerous; in the first week of December there were eighty-eight air raids.<sup>72</sup> However, by early January 1944 the defensive perimeter was mostly complete, with 14,000 yards defended by the Buckeye Division.<sup>73</sup> The GIs continued digging in, especially since intelligence reports in late February provided evidence that a major Japanese attack was forming.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>73</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30 1944, G-3 Operations Narrative.

Evidence of an impending Japanese attack became increasingly apparent. In late February the U.S. Navy intercepted a Japanese radio message that detailed a large scale attack was to be conducted around March 6.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, there was increased contact with reinforced Japanese patrols, and artillery reconnaissance planes noted the massing of Japanese forces. The most crucial intelligence came from prisoners of war, who confirmed the Japanese would attack in early March.<sup>75</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was to attack Hill 260 at the front of the Americal Division sector, while the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment was to attack the high ground near Blue Ridge as a diversionary attack.<sup>76</sup> The main effort was believed to be an assault from the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment against the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's perimeter along the Numa-Numa trail.<sup>77</sup> However, it readily became apparent that the Japanese were to concentrate on seizing Hill 700 and Cannon Hill.

Hill 700 was the lynchpin of the American perimeter and strongpoint of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. It was an elevated area in the center of the defensive line that overlooked the new airfield. Beightler understood the importance of this area and ordered a large number of heavy artillery pieces to cover Hill 700.<sup>78</sup> However, he was not entirely convinced the Japanese would focus their attack on it because of the formidable steepness and dense overgrowth. The crack Japanese 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, responsible for the massacre at Nanking, led the attack against Hill 700. The Japanese command was so sure of victory that they had already planned where Major General Griswold, commander of XIV Corps, would surrender. General Hyakutake's fanatical troops were sent off with a speech that began: "The time has come to manifest our

---

<sup>74</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 12, chapter 18, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30 1944, Lessons of the Bougainville Campaign – Headquarters 37<sup>th</sup> ID.

<sup>76</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 12, chapter 18, 38.

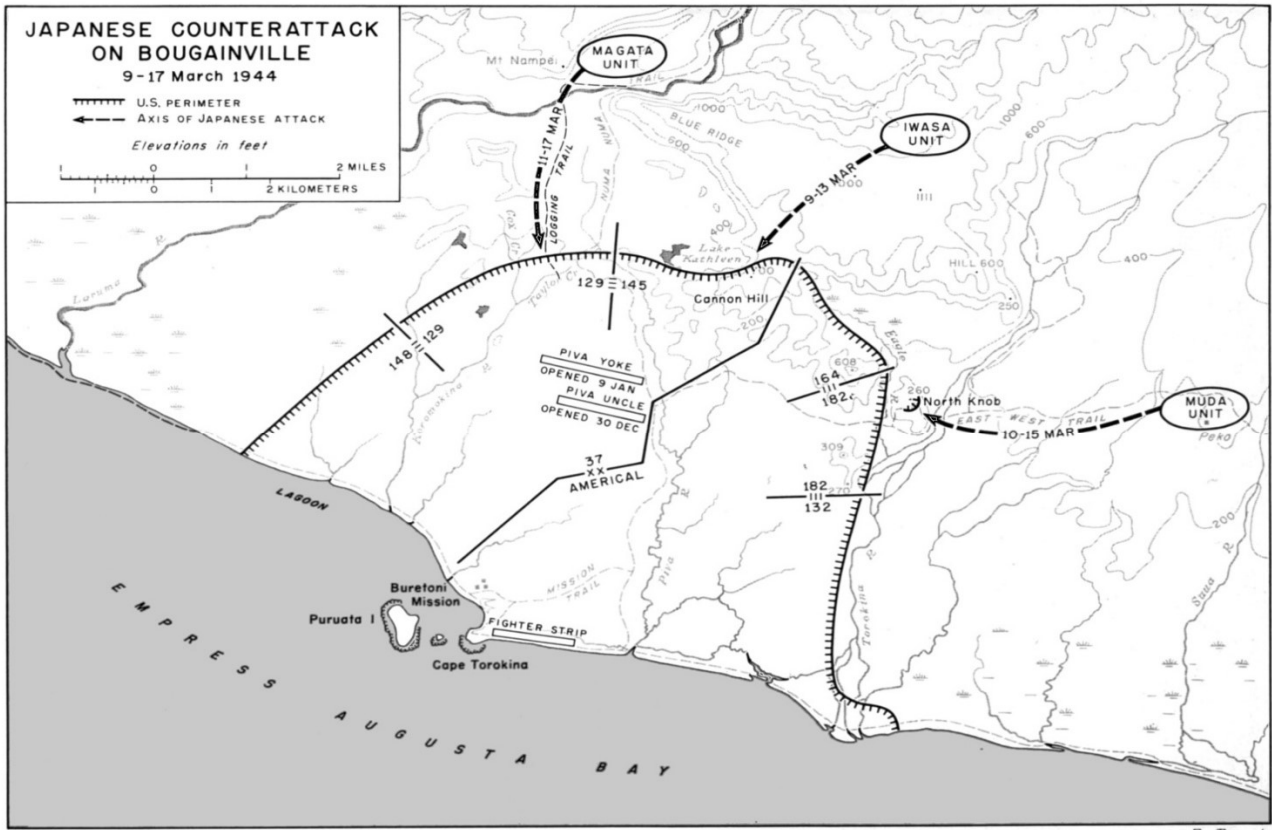
<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 40.

knighthood with the pure brilliance of the sword. It is our duty to erase the mortification of our brothers at Guadalcanal. Attack. Assault. Destroy Everything. Cut, slash, and mow them down.”<sup>79</sup> It was with this setting that battle was joined between the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the Japanese on Bougainville in what was one of the bloodiest engagements of the South Pacific War. On a small beachhead on Bougainville the farmers, schoolboys, and shopkeepers of the Buckeye Division engaged some of the most capable troops in the Imperial Japanese Army, who had been waging war for nearly a decade.

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 42.



MAP 22

### Japanese Counterattack and American Disposition<sup>80</sup>

At dawn on March 8, 1944, Japanese artillery shells began falling on Hill 700. Beightler ordered the guns of six field artillery battalions to respond as the last American patrols were withdrawn into the defensive perimeter. The barrage inflicted severe casualties on the advancing Japanese, at least until they advanced close enough to American lines to force the artillery to lift for fear of causing friendly casualties. The Japanese next encountered the ingenious idea of Staff Sergeant Otis Hawkins. Hawkins created a device that set fuel buckets ablaze with phosphorus grenades once Japanese soldiers began to cut the barbed wire in front of the American positions. The blazes lit up the battlefield, increasing the accuracy of hundreds of 60mm mortar rounds and

<sup>80</sup> John Miller, "Bougainville Counterattack," HyperWar: US Army in WWII: CARTWHEEL--The Reduction of Rabaul. Accessed February 13, 2018.

American small arms fire.<sup>81</sup> The assault failed. The Japanese resumed their advance on March 9 and a Japanese battalion breached the outermost perimeter to penetrate into the American line.<sup>82</sup> However, their progress came at a high price as the men of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment refused to retreat from their positions. Beightler immediately dispatched the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion from reserve to Hill 700. He also sent light tanks forward from the 75<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion.<sup>83</sup> Despite the reinforcements, the reinforced American counterattack was unable to dislodge the Japanese from the hill. The Japanese fortified the captured positions and brought forward anti-aircraft guns to fire directly onto American infantry. On March 10 the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were able to push the Japanese back and received additional support when soldiers from the 37<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop arrived. However, the bloody struggle for Hill 700 was not yet finished.

On March 11 the Japanese 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, part of the infamous 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, continued the fight for Hill 700 with battalion sized banzai attacks. The exhausted GIs held firm after three days of continuous fighting.<sup>84</sup> The Japanese had managed to establish interlocking fields of machine gun fire in uphill positions that fired down on American counterattacks and disrupted the main American supply line to Hill 700. Casualty evacuation remained difficult as tanks, armored cars, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were dispatched to assist.<sup>85</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was delighted when they were introduced to the bazooka, which some men described as being “more fun than a barrel of monkeys.”<sup>86</sup> Continuous counterattacks finally managed to dislodge the Japanese from Hill 700. Gerald Shaner, 2<sup>nd</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 19, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, recaptured one of the final bunkers. Shaner was awarded a Silver Star for his heroic actions.<sup>87</sup> Japanese prisoners later reported that the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was essentially annihilated.<sup>88</sup> The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was able to repulse the Japanese in their first defensive action of the war and thereby protect the American beachhead.

Division historians best described the battle for Hill 700 when they stated: “at no time in their campaigns in the Pacific did the 37<sup>th</sup> Division meet enemy soldiers equal to those in valor or ability” – a sentiment also expressed by Beightler.<sup>89</sup> The defense of Hill 700 cost the GI’s 184 killed, 1,304 wounded, and four missing.<sup>90</sup> However, the citizen soldiers had little time to celebrate. Captured Japanese documents and prisoner information revealed that the 13<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments were to join the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the Magata Detachment, for an assault on the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment’s sector.<sup>91</sup>

The objective of the Japanese assault was to attempt again to split the American line. General Beightler attached elements of the 131<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Chemical Mortar Battalion, and several tanks from the 754<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion to the infantry to bolster their defense. The terrain was favorable for American artillery as it pounded the flat area of advance. The 136<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery fired so many shells during this battle that the adapter plugs became stuck in many of the guns.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division artillery units always kept one gun loaded to respond with immediate counterbattery fire, thus preventing Japanese artillery from having any significant effect. The effectiveness of American counterbattery fire was exemplified

---

<sup>87</sup> Gerald Shaner, Interview conducted by Tyler Webb, Westerville, Ohio, August 25, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 19,, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>90</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30 1944, G-3 Operations Narrative.

<sup>91</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30 1944, Intelligence Narrative of the Bougainville Operation, G-2 Section, and Lt. Col. Demas Sears.

<sup>92</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 20, 11.



by a prisoner report that “enemy field artillery was reported by a prisoner to be unable to fire, as there were no personnel left, and most of the guns were destroyed.”<sup>93</sup> Corporal Arthur Davidson further aided the artillery by turning captured Japanese knee mortars into flare projectors – an adaption adopted across the division.<sup>94</sup> The Japanese assault found initial success, just as it had on Hill 700, with the seizure of seven pillboxes. Japanese infantry penetrated approximately 50 yards into the American line with heavy mortar and machine gun support, but their advance rapidly stalled.

It became readily apparent to the Japanese that soldiers with suicidal anti-tank lunge mines were ineffective against American infantry-tank tactics. Additionally, the Japanese force was simply too weakened from the battle for Hill 700. The Japanese assault was dealt a critical blow when captured documents informed Lieutenant Colonel Demas Sears, the Division G-2, where the Japanese headquarters was located – the 135<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery promptly disposed of it.<sup>95</sup> On March 24 the Japanese under Colonel Magata launched a final assault with the men that remained from the tatters of various Japanese units. This attack proved catastrophic for the Japanese because Beightler was able to secure 15,000 precious artillery rounds from Major General Griswold prior to the assault.<sup>96</sup> The assault foundered due to the massive American firepower, and on March 27 the remnants of the Japanese forces retreated, marking the end of the Japanese offensive efforts. The Japanese on Bougainville, even though they still occupied the vast majority of the island, were now completely cut off from their homeland. The crack 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was no longer combat effective and the American airfields were secured.

---

<sup>93</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30 1944, Intelligence Narrative of the Bougainville Operation, G-2 Section, Lt. Col. Demas Sears.

<sup>94</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 20, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

Beightler's staff described the battle as one in which "wherever our troops met the Japanese quarter was neither given nor expected."<sup>97</sup>

A variety of factors made the American victory on Bougainville possible. The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion created a two-way road system along the length of the perimeter that allowed for the rapid deployment of reserve forces, distribution of supplies, and recovery of casualties. The 37<sup>th</sup> Signal Company established so many communication channels that it was incredibly rare for a unit not to have contact with division headquarters.<sup>98</sup> This constant communication with the frontline was a hallmark of Major General Beightler's command, a product of the early training days at Camp Shelby. If Beightler was not at the front line he wanted to know exactly what was occurring there. These factors, combined with the logistical and American firepower superiority, made victory possible. However, victory was only achieved through the sacrifice and valor of the infantrymen. Beightler's summation of the battle displayed his pride in the division: "one-time farmers, factory-workers, miners, and office men from America have out-scouted, out-maneuvered, out-fought, and above all, out-lived the best the Japanese had been able to throw against them – and on ground of the Jap's choosing."<sup>99</sup>

The aftermath of the major battle for Bougainville consisted of what became known as the "three Ps" to the Buckeyes: pursuit, patrol, and police.<sup>100</sup> The most significant of these activities were the patrols. Colonel Lawrence White, commanding the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, formed a special unit known as the "White Butai" that conducted several missions to destroy enemy forces. The result was over 400 slain enemy combatants at the cost of twenty-six friendly

---

<sup>97</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 21, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 22, 1.

casualties.<sup>101</sup> General Beightler and his regimental commanders believed these patrols were critical for replacements to earn combat experience for the next campaign. The artillery units also had the opportunity to provide replacements with experience, especially new forward observers, because they maintained bombardment on the Japanese in the Upper Laruma River Region. The combat experience gained through these actions proved invaluable in the division's next action on Luzon.

Beightler and his staff spent significant time evaluating their experience on Bougainville. Overall, they found that "the principles and doctrines taught in the General and Special Service Field Manuals were found to be sound" and should continue to be emphasized and expanded upon.<sup>102</sup> The biggest emphasis was on getting replacements into reserve units to provide them as much experience as quickly as possible. Sometimes replacements were used to unload ships when they arrived, which Beightler now forbade. They also found that the best way to attack the Japanese was as quickly as possible. If the Japanese were able to establish defensive positions, as they did on Hill 700, then it became quite difficult to remove them. This lesson likely influenced Beightler's decision to progress rapidly in the Cagayan Valley on Luzon. The American defense on Bougainville also demonstrated the importance of infantry-tank action and engineer battalions. The counterattacks conducted with tanks, such as one Beightler led at Cox Creek, were only able to be executed because of armor. The after action report viewed tanks, in a defensive operation, as a form of mobile defense that allow for potent counterattacks and emphasized that they should not be used as "stationary pillboxes."<sup>103</sup> The defense of Hill 700 only succeed because of the roads and paths made by the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. The ability to

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>102</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943- April 30 1944, Lessons of Bougainville Campaign - Headquarters 37<sup>th</sup> ID.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

rapidly shift forces and material prevented the Japanese from exploiting their breakthroughs and allowed for armor to navigate through the jungle.

For the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the aftermath of the fighting on Bougainville became a monotonous routine of patrols and training, which quickly turned to boredom. The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion became known as the “Highway Department” during this time for its extensive efforts to create an effective road system. The arrival of fresh food, mail, and especially beer, helped to raise morale. However, morale was dealt a severe blow when the promise that the men would receive rest in New Zealand was broken. This occurred because the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was transferred from the command of Admiral Halsey and Major General Harmon to General Douglas MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific command, principally because MacArthur lacked sufficient manpower in his quest to liberate the Philippines.

Another reality for Beightler was that he was passed over for promotion in favor of less experienced generals. He remained a division commander even as Generals John Hodges (Americal Division), Joseph Collins (25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division), Frank Sibert (6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division), and Innis Swift (1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) all received promotions.<sup>104</sup> All of these Regular Army commanders, with the exception of Hodges, were less experienced than Beightler. Despite his disappointment, Beightler had little time to protest as he prepared the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division for its next action.

By this time in the war the front had moved past the Solomon Islands. The next target for the Buckeye Division was to be the Philippines. Beightler appreciated the fact that every island closer to Japan would be contested by an enemy fighting with ever increasing desperation. From

---

<sup>104</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 142.

May through December 1944 the 37<sup>th</sup> conducted a massive, three-phase training program.<sup>105</sup> The first phase focused on infantry assault teamwork, while the second phase was on tank-infantry training. The culminating phase was amphibious training. Training also emphasized specialist weaponry such as flamethrowers and bazookas. This training was based partially on the division's experience on Bougainville, when some soldiers were learning how to operate the bazookas for the first time in combat situations. Additionally, new 155mm howitzers were provided to the artillery units to help replace their battle-worn machines.

The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion constructed six ranges with complete replicas of Japanese fortifications to practice assault tactics. Beightler allowed for company commanders to have free decision-making based on objectives and also provided them with combat support auxiliaries such as engineers and anti-tank units.<sup>106</sup> Beightler always expected his officers to adapt and effectively use resources to spare men. The tank-infantry coordination in these maneuvers proved to be critical in the later campaign on Luzon. The infantry learned the benefits and limitations of tanks; they especially found communications with tank crews difficult. Armor was effectively used throughout the Bougainville campaign, especially in counterattacks, and was to be critical on Luzon as well. The amphibious training emphasized the importance of communications and rapid deployment during beach landings. Beightler and his staff critically evaluated each exercise and rectified any issues they came across. For instance, they found that the cargo slings on several transports were unable to lift the heavy 155mm howitzers.<sup>107</sup> Desperately needed replacements and equipment also arrived during this time. The 112<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion received new ambulances and the 37<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop was provided M5

---

<sup>105</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 13, chapter 27, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 7.

“Stuart” light tanks. The most important addition was the new erector-type Bailey bridges that were essential in spanning the rivers on the eventual drive towards Manila. However, all of this equipment and training failed to answer the question on every Buckeye’s mind: what was next? A critical point from the Bougainville after action report was that “all assaults must necessarily take into account that the Jap, no matter how hopelessly outnumbered or outmaneuvered, habitually fights until he is killed.”<sup>108</sup> The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division would soon learn again just how accurate that assessment was.

### **Philippines: Lingayen Gulf to the Cagayan Valley**

By mid-October 1944 Beightler learned that the division was to participate in the invasion of Luzon as an element of the Sixth U.S. Army. Originally the division was supposed to land on Leyte and Mindanao; however, Mindanao was bypassed and Leyte fell to XXIV Corps before the division was needed. MacArthur ordered the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to enter the fight at Lingayen Gulf.<sup>109</sup> Its objective was Manila, the capital of the Philippines. In what was to be one of the largest amphibious operations in history, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was designated to be the center of the landing force. The Buckeyes assumed the battle for Luzon would be Tarawa-like in its ferocity. The division history related the mood was one in which the GIs “increased their churchgoing and wrote semi-goodbye notes to their wives and sweethearts.”<sup>110</sup> The battle-tested infantrymen of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division knew they were shipping out when they received oranges at breakfast in mid-December 1944.<sup>111</sup> Their sea voyage proved monotonous as usual,

---

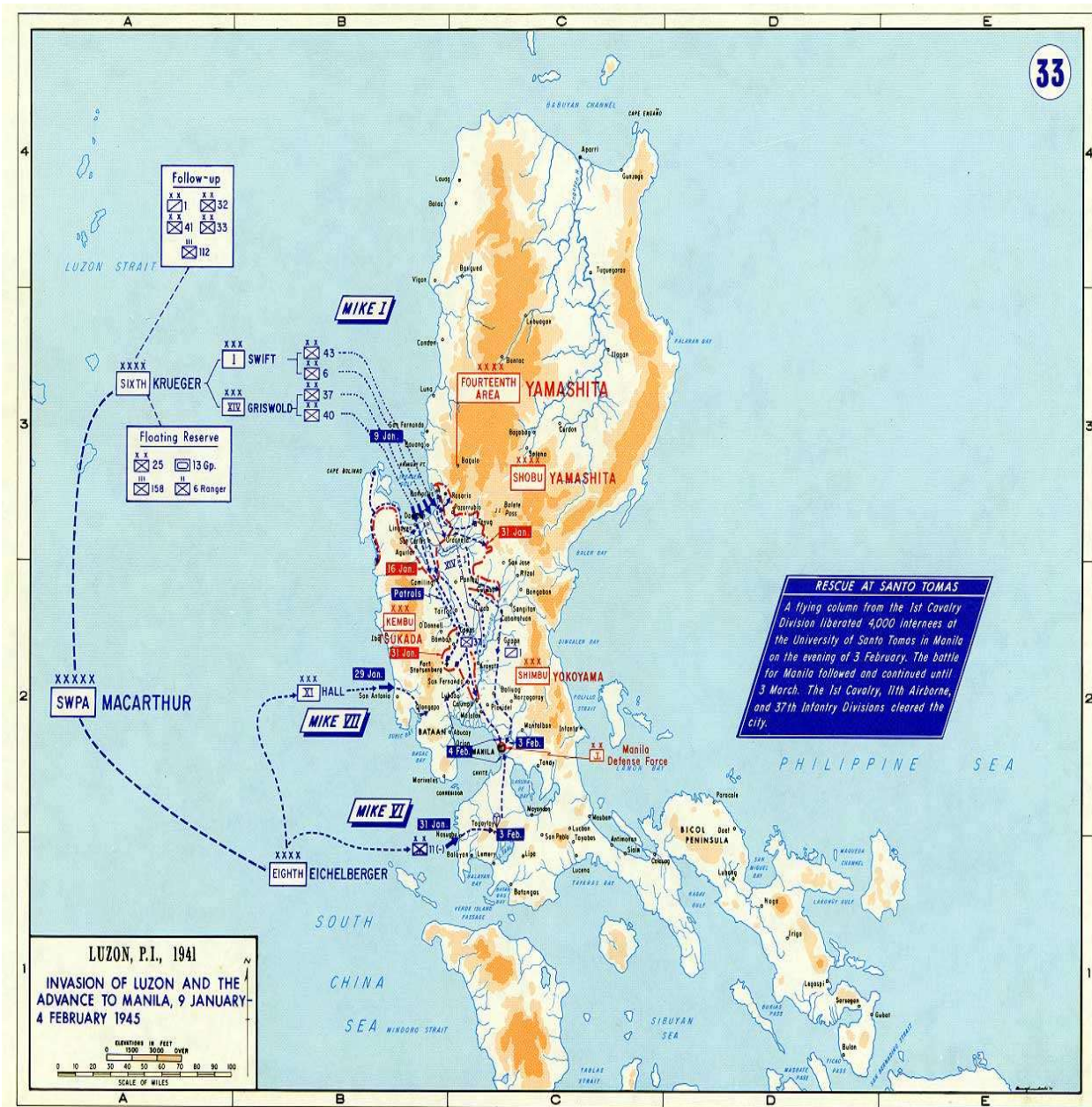
<sup>108</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 18, After Action Reports, Bougainville, November 8 1943 - April 30, 1944, Lessons of Bougainville Campaign - Headquarters 37<sup>th</sup> ID.

<sup>109</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 28, pages 8-10.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., chapter 30, 8.

although a brief stop at Seeadler Harbor in the Admiralty Islands provided some relaxation. On January 8, 1945, the men received ammunition and final church services were held.

The Invasion of Luzon<sup>112</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Andrade, Dale. "Luzon: 1944-1945." October 3, 2003.

General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the respected “Tiger of Malaya,” led the Japanese forces in the Philippines. His force on Luzon consisted of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 103<sup>rd</sup>, 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the 58<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Mixed Brigades, the experienced 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, and a number other units.<sup>113</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions also arrived as reinforcements. The Japanese defense was carried out in the absence of significant air strength. The American 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet carrier strikes had decimated Japanese aircraft on Luzon and American land-based aircraft were deployed on Leyte and Morotai to assist in maintaining air supremacy over the island.<sup>114</sup> The effectiveness of these attacks led Lieutenant General Muto, Yamashita’s chief of staff, to conclude that there was no realistic ability for the Japanese to contest American airpower.<sup>115</sup> However, Japanese kamikaze attacks proved to be capable of significant destruction and were psychologically devastating. Combined Task Force (CTF) 79, which carried the Buckeye Division to the beach, suffered damage to eleven ships from kamikazes and eight from explosive boats or hand placed charges during the first two days of landings.<sup>116</sup> CTF 79, carrying the supplies and approximately 28,000 men of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, lost 720 sailors in the first five days of the invasion.

---

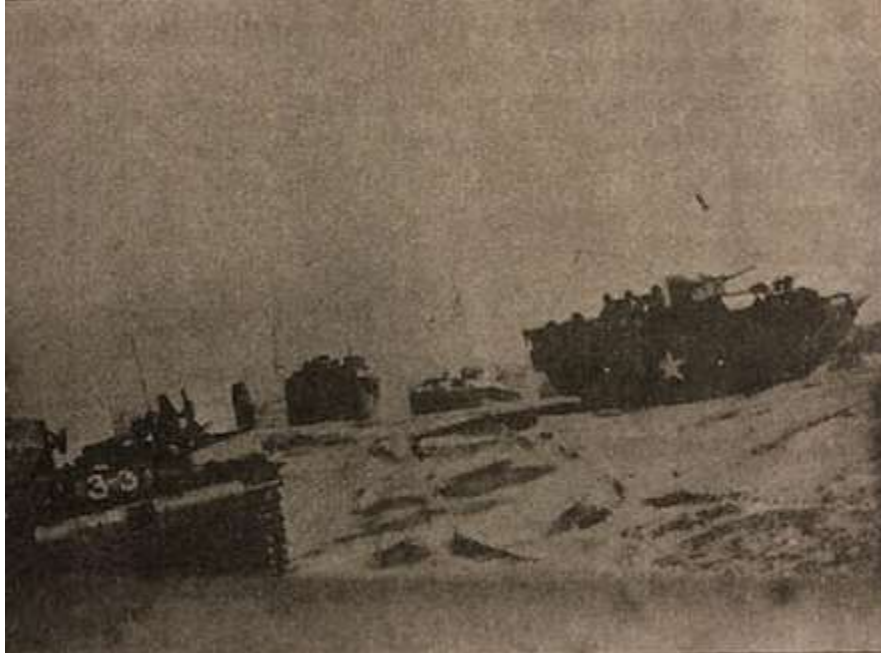
<sup>113</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 28, 12.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>115</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 37, Yamashita’s Surrender, Summary of Interrogations of General Yamashita and other Responsible Commanders and Staff Officers.

<sup>116</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 20, After Action Reports, Third Amphibious Force, Lingayen Gulf, February 5, 1945,





37<sup>th</sup> LVTs Landing at Lingayen Gulf<sup>117</sup>



D-Day + 1 at Lingayen Gulf<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 21, After Action Reports, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation, July 29, 1945, G-2 Report.

<sup>118</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 37, After Action Reports, Amphibious Group Seven, Lingayen Gulf, January 20, 1945,

The beginning of the end of World War II for the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commenced at 0445 hours on January 9, 1945.<sup>119</sup> The guns of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet pounded the shores of Luzon as U.S. aircraft flew overhead. The 129<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments landed at 0930 hours on Crimson and Yellow beaches.<sup>120</sup> The landing was essentially uncontested as the Americans were greeted onshore by a number of Filipinos. The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment quickly seized Binmaley and then crossed the Calmay River in the afternoon in the wake of the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.<sup>121</sup> The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment landed the next day and was designated as division reserve. The GIs were surprised when they encountered only sporadic resistance and by the American-friendly atmosphere of many towns. The division had only fought in jungles and had not received any rest in a civilized location during the war. Being greeted as liberators was a welcomed occurrence to the Americans as they swiftly advanced towards Manila. The advance was so rapid that the artillery units struggled to maintain pace with the infantry – which Beightler remedied with an increased use of air strikes.

The division encountered its first significant problem on January 16 when it realized that twenty-one bridges on the thirteen-mile road from Camiling to Paniqui were all heavily damaged or destroyed.<sup>122</sup> The downed bridges were largely a self-inflicted wound. U.S. aircraft destroyed several bridges, especially near the Agno River, before the Lingayen landings because intelligence officers feared a rapid Japanese counterattack against the beachhead.<sup>123</sup> Despite the blown bridges, Beightler was pleased with the pace at which his division was moving; however,

---

<sup>119</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 30, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 37, After Action Reports, Amphibious Group Seven, Lingayen Gulf, January 20, 1945,

<sup>121</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 31, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>123</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 21, After Action Reports, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation, July 29, 1945, G-2 Report.

there were some significant growing concerns. The division was now seventy miles from the beach with a relatively exposed left flank, and the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reported significant enemy contact on the right flank.<sup>124</sup> Beightler assigned the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to protect the exposed flank and the main supply route but was soon forced to re-task it to seize Clark Field, Fort Stotsenburg and its nearby high ground. He also assigned the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, minus its 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, to take part in the operation.

The American advance on Clark Field and Fort Stotsenburg, which began on January 28, immediately encountered significant Japanese artillery fire and mines of endless variety. The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion removed 1,349 mines before the battle was over.<sup>125</sup> The Buckeyes were able to dig in around the runways by nightfall and repelled a Japanese counterattack that evening. Company I of the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment took substantial casualties when six Japanese tanks engaged the unit. Fortunately, the 745<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion and 637<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion arrived just in time to assist the infantrymen and save what remained of the company.<sup>126</sup>

The Japanese were heavily entrenched in the nearby hills, and it was only through the thoroughly drilled tank-infantry tactics from Bougainville that the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was able to accomplish its mission. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger personally raised the American flag on Fort Stotsenburg on January 31. The cost for the division was more than 350 casualties in exchange for nearly 800 Japanese killed and a significant amount of heavy weaponry captured or destroyed.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 31, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 31.



Infantry-Tank Tactics at Clark Field<sup>128</sup>

The arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at Lingayen Gulf on January 27 marked the beginning of the race to Manila – the sole objective of both divisions. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division began its movement down Highway 3 with the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment leading the column while the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry proceeded southward on Highway 5. General MacArthur and Major General Beightler encountered one another on the highway, where MacArthur conveyed to Beightler that he wished to see the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division take Manila first. This was a remnant of the old bond Beightler and MacArthur shared from their World War I days with the Rainbow Division. General MacArthur was the division chief of staff, while Beightler was a battalion adjutant for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 166<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. However, the reality of the situation heavily favored the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. It was a mechanized tank-tipped spearhead that did not need to cross

---

<sup>128</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 23, After Action Reports, 37<sup>th</sup> Division, Luzon, November 1, 1944 - June 30, 1945.

nearly as many rivers. Despite their disadvantages, Beightler's men believed they could and would beat the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division to Manila.

The first step to this objective was the seizure of Plaridel, a city twenty miles north of Manila at which Highways 3 and 5 merge. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reached Plaridel first and encountered an entrenched Japanese garrison that consisted of five reinforced companies. The division overcame their first experience with street combat with relative ease; however, their advance was halted at the Pampanga River. The Sixth Army engineers did not provide the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division with enough bridging material to cross the river, which forced the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion to improvise.<sup>129</sup> This delay allowed the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry to reach Manila first. Beightler and his GIs viewed this shortfall as yet another slight against National Guardsmen, but the allocation of bridging material between the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division was no doubt based on the number of vehicles in each organization. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reached the outskirts of Manila on February 6 after covering approximately 160 miles from Lingayen Gulf. The men immediately made use of beer supplies left at the Balintawak Brewery – there was no trouble finding volunteers to guard the position. Despite this brief respite, the ensuing battle for Manila proved to be the most costly single engagement for soldiers of the Buckeye Division of the entire war.

The Japanese defenses in Manila consisted of interlocking fields of fire in heavily fortified buildings on essentially every street with minefields, pillboxes, and trenches throughout the city. The Japanese force in Manila consisted of elements from the 41<sup>st</sup> Army, known as the Shimbu Shudan, under the command of Lieutenant General Shizuo Yokoyama, and the Manila

---

<sup>129</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 31, 34.

Naval Defense Force under Rear Admiral Mitsui Iwabuchi.<sup>130</sup> They possessed nearly 20,000 troops and the support of a small number of pro-Japanese Filipinos, known as the Makapili.<sup>131</sup> The Japanese strategy was to situate a screening force north of the Pasig River while establishing defenses in the northern sector of the city.<sup>132</sup> Beightler's division advanced with the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on the right flank and the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on the left flank, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division assaulted the city on the division's left flank. The 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne was also approaching Manila from the south. The liberation of Bilibid Prison on February 3 filled the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division with pride and anger as horror stories of the treatment of American prisoners of war permeated the ranks.

Shortly after this triumph, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division encountered the first significant Japanese resistance. The Japanese had set fire to many structures and the flames were too intense for the GIs to proceed through. Company K, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, led by Captain Labin Knipp, was flanked by burning buildings as it attempted to seize the Jones Bridge to cross the Pasig River. Under intense enemy fire, Captain Knipp ordered the withdrawal of his company and stood in the intersection to suppress the enemy forces and lay down smoke grenades. He was wounded in the stomach as he assumed command of the rear guard and was the last man of his company to retreat from the bridge.<sup>133</sup> Courageous acts such as this, exceptional leadership, and ubiquitous firefights characterized the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's battle in Manila.

---

<sup>130</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 32, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>133</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 33, 17.

As the division advanced into northern Manila, Beightler tasked the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment with seizing the Tondo District. The regiment encountered significant fire from Japanese artillery, heavy mortars, and even naval guns. The original Japanese strategy was to utilize the Polo-Dampalit area near Manila Bay to protect their forces from an American amphibious assault. However, this assault never materialized, so the Japanese attempted a breakout. They encountered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment along Highway 3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was able to halt several Japanese counterattacks before Beightler had them relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on February 5.<sup>134</sup> The Japanese force was significant; it contained four battalions along with some other ad hoc units. Beightler's strategy to deal with the Japanese breakout was centered on protecting his outnumbered force. The GIs were to contain the Japanese pocket rather than engage it until reinforcements arrived to provide a sufficient force to eliminate the Japanese.<sup>135</sup>

Beightler assigned the Regimental Anti-Tank Company and some other units of the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to block the Talitip area, thus trapping the Japanese.<sup>136</sup> He then reinforced the assault with the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon of the Regimental Anti-Tank Company and a medium tank platoon. A determined foe awaited the Buckeyes in unfavorable terrain laden with flooded fishponds and steep riverbanks. The first attempted advance proved too costly, with nearly 200 casualties as the American force had to withdraw.<sup>137</sup> A second attack, reinforced with an engineer platoon, achieved better progress. Although the destruction of the Japanese pocket was ongoing, the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was desperately needed in the battle for Manila.

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., chapter 34, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>137</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 35, 9.

As the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division prepared to enter Manila they were greeted with near constant artillery and mortar fire while Japan rockets screeched overhead – a new weapon encountered by the GIs. The Buckeyes possessed excellent artillery; however, orders from General MacArthur, who wanted to limit infrastructure damage to Manila, severely limited its use. The Guardsmen looked on helplessly at night as the sky glowed from the illumination of burning buildings – it was apparent the Japanese intended to destroy the city. It was not until February 7 that the winds shifted so that the fires were reduced enough for the infantry to advance. The first divisional unit to enter the heart of Manila was the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, attached to the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, through the Santa Cruz District. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment led the assault across the Pasig River.

Major General Beightler continuously protested General MacArthur's order limiting American artillery usage in Manila. Despite the reduction of significant artillery support, the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment crossed the Pasig River at 2010 hours on February 7.<sup>138</sup> Major General Beightler again displayed his leadership by placing himself at the front of his advancing infantrymen to direct the attack under intense artillery and mortar fire – leadership for which he eventually received the Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>139</sup> The 112<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion's report best summarized the battle with the statement that "Manila south of the Pasig was a fantasia of death and destruction."<sup>140</sup>

Once across the Pasig River, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division came into contact with heavily fortified Japanese forces at the Paco Railroad Station. The 300 man strong bastion was complete

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., chapter 36, 4.

<sup>139</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 2, General Orders, 1941-1945, August 29, 1945, General Orders Number 141.

<sup>140</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 24.



with the typical stout Japanese fortifications as well as several 20mm guns and a 37mm gun.<sup>141</sup> The task of seizing the station was given to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the engagement resulted in two men earning the Medal of Honor. Private First Class John Reese and Sergeant Cleto Rodriguez, two automatic riflemen, were credited with killing eighty-two enemy combatants, destroying a 20mm gun, and neutralizing a heavy machine gun nest – Reese was killed in the action.<sup>142</sup> Their Medal of Honor citations stated: “The intrepid team, in two and a half hours of fierce fighting, killed more than 82 Japanese, completely disorganized their defense and paved the way for subsequent complete defeat of the enemy at this strong point.”<sup>143</sup> This engagement for the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division resulted in 19 dead and 216 wounded, higher casualties than on any other day of the Luzon Campaign. However, the Buckeyes still managed to take the station and the nearby Paco School by February 10.

While the GIs wrestled the Paco Railroad Station from the Japanese, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were tasked with seizing Provisor Island. The initial assault proved disastrous; a subsequent attack on February 11, better supported by accurate artillery fire and reinforcements, succeeded. On this day the GIs also made a startling discovery when they uncovered hundreds of slain Chinese and Filipino civilians, victims of Japanese sabers, bullets, and bayonets.<sup>144</sup> Beightler captured the effect on the division when he remarked that “the atrocities committed against innocent Filipinos have filled us with furious hatred.”<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>143</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 12, Awards, Medal of Honor Citations, 1943-1946, Official Citation for Cleto Rodriguez and John Reese.

<sup>144</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 21.

<sup>145</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 125.

By February 14 tanks and tank destroyers, accompanied by 105mm howitzers, advanced into the city to support the infantry with direct fire. Tanks proved to be incredibly effective in the urban warfare as combined infantry-tank tactics repeatedly prevailed. The 6<sup>th</sup>, 135<sup>th</sup>, 136<sup>th</sup>, and 140<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalions provided accurate indirect fire; however, close direct fire was more effective against urban buildings. The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment used this new source of firepower in the seizure of the Philippine General Hospital, where the Japanese had taken several thousand civilians as hostages. The regiment liberated nearly 5,000 civilians and secure most of the hospital.

The carnage in Manila up to this point forced MacArthur to lift many of the restrictions he had previously imposed on American artillery. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment seized the New Police Station, another Japanese stronghold. The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment also seized several other key buildings, including a particularly intense battle for City Hall. As the battle for Manila dragged on, units were beginning to weaken from the continuous action. Company I lost two company commanders and was down to only eighty men after the City Hall engagement.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, the regiment lost two battalion commanders – Lieutenant Colonels Richard Crooks and George Coleman – both close friends of Beightler.<sup>147</sup> However, the significant task of seizing Intramuros, a colonial Spanish fortress, was still ahead. Beightler and his staff devised an exceptional strategy for assaulting the stronghold that again displayed his deep care for the lives of his men.

---

<sup>146</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 43.

<sup>147</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 177, 184.



Tank Searching for Snipers in Manila<sup>148</sup>



Ruins of the New Police Station<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 21, After Action Reports, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation, July 29, 1945, G-2 Report.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



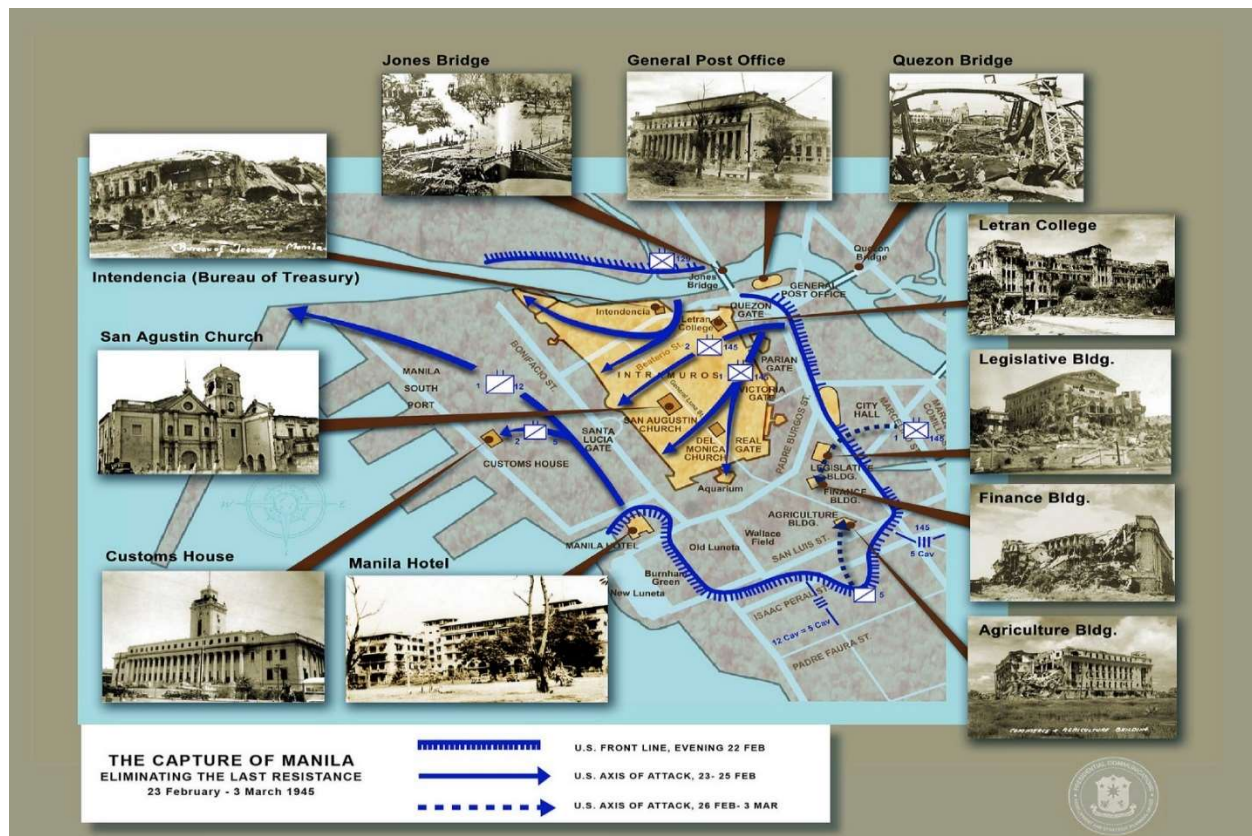
The General Post Office<sup>150</sup>

The premise of the Intramuros plan was to assault the Japanese in multiple sectors to confuse their communications and thus their defense. Lieutenant Colonel George Woods, commanding officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, established the tone of the operation with his statement about Intramuros's walls and architecture: "It's made of rocks and stone, forty feet thick at the bottom and twenty feet thick at the top. It's filled within winding passages, ancient dungeons, and countless hidden recesses and it's going to be up to you men to clean the Nips out of there."<sup>151</sup> The assault began on Intramuros on February 23 with an hour of artillery bombardment. However, this use of artillery displeased General MacArthur – as it did throughout the battle of Manila. A few days prior to the attack on Intramuros, Beightler was accused of unnecessarily destroying the city with his heavy use of artillery. General MacArthur

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustration, "Assault on Intramuros" – Keith L. Barker.

had previously ordered the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to be restricted to using 37mm guns at the largest.<sup>152</sup> Beightler, knowing that his men were already suffering heavy casualties, refused the order, stating that he “would rather be relieved of command than carry out that order” and expected to be removed shortly thereafter.”<sup>153</sup> MacArthur dispatched his Chief of Staff, Lt. General Richard Sutherland, to discuss the issue, and Beightler was able to convince him that the artillery fire was needed.



### The Intramuros Operation<sup>154</sup>

After the bombardment a thick smoke screen was laid down by mortars as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment stormed a hole in the wall blown near the north gate while

<sup>152</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 184.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Malacañan Palace. "Battle of Manila." Malacanang. Accessed February 13, 2018.



and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was brought in by assault boats over the Pasig River.<sup>155</sup> During the assault General Beightler positioned his command post, which was subjected to occasional small-arms fire, in a hotel directly across the river to observe and direct the fight. Intramuros was largely seized by February 23, with Colonel Cecil Whitcomb's 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment finishing off the Japanese garrison the following afternoon. The Intramuros operation was a resounding success. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division suffered twenty-five dead and 265 wounded, but eliminated a 2,500 strong Japanese garrison and saved 2,000 civilians. Nearly half of the slain Japanese were casualties of accurate artillery fire.<sup>156</sup> Brigadier General Clyde Eddleman, General Kreuger's G-3, referred to the action as "one of the most beautifully conceived and perfectly executed plans I have ever known."<sup>157</sup> Unfortunately, the division was unable to save all of the civilians held hostage in the Intramuros. Keith L. Barker recalled a scene while rescuing civilians in which "we knew why there had been tears behind these weak sad smiles. There were no Filipino men among the battered refugees. No fathers, brothers, husbands, and sweethearts. All had been murdered."<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 50.

<sup>156</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 193.

<sup>157</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 50.

<sup>158</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustration, "Assault on Intramuros" – Keith L. Barker



The Assault on Intramuros<sup>159</sup>



The Women and Children who Survived Intramuros<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 23, After Action Reports, 37<sup>th</sup> Division, Luzon, November 1, 1944 - June 30, 1945.

<sup>160</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 21, After Action Reports, XIV Corps, M-1 Operation, July 29, 1945, G-2 Report.

The legislative, finance, and agricultural buildings were the last significant Japanese strongholds, with garrisons of around 700 men each equipped with machine guns, mortars, and 37mm and 75mm guns.<sup>161</sup> The battle for these buildings began on February 25 and continued until March 3. The assaults affirmed what the infantrymen already knew – the Japanese would fight to the last man. The legislative building took four days to seize and was the site where Medal of Honor recipient Cleto Rodriquez won a Silver Star for leading Company B in its assault on the complex.<sup>162</sup> The costly battle for Manila finally ended when the finance building fell to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The estimated Japanese dead in Manila totaled 16,665 men, with 13,006 of them being credited to the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>163</sup> The cost to seize the city was high, as the division suffered 3,732 combat casualties, 461 of them killed.<sup>164</sup>

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was reassigned from XIV Corps after seizing Manila and placed under I Corps. The division's new mission was to secure and establish order in Manila. The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and 135<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery were ordered to secure the city, the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and 140<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery secured the outskirts, and the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment guarded bridges, conducted patrols, and manned outposts.<sup>165</sup> A particularly difficult problem facing the men was determining if the Filipino collaborators turned into them had actually aided the Japanese. The Buckeyes found there simply was no definitive way to distinguish between a collaborator and non-collaborator.<sup>166</sup> The GIs often found that those who turned in the "collaborators" were often taking out old retributions and settling personal debts.

---

<sup>161</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 14, chapter 36, 57

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 37, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 3.



Most of the civilian matters were relegated to Civil Affairs units.<sup>167</sup> Overall, the task of peacekeeping in Manila was welcomed by the GIs, as replacements began to fill the depleted ranks. Men enjoyed themselves in ruins of the city and appreciated the lack of Japanese bullets and artillery constantly harassing them. The relaxation was short-lived, as all passes were cancelled on March 24 and the division prepared for yet another engagement.

### **Mountain & Valley Shock Troops**

The Japanese forces withdrew into the mountains in northern Luzon, where Yamashita intended to make his final stand. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division infantrymen now had to adapt to mountain warfare they had never trained for nor previously experienced. The next objective was Baguio, the summer capital of the Philippines. As the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment progressed down the Naguilian-Baguio highway, also known as Route 9, they faced vertical cliffs to one side and dense jungle to the other. Additionally, Japanese artillery began to pour shells down from their positions on the high ground. The 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Igorots, Filipino soldiers from the mountainous areas of Luzon in the Cordillera region, engaged one of these positions only to lose nearly half of their men.<sup>168</sup> These Japanese positions also killed Lieutenant Colonel Steward Brown, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, when a shell scored a direct hit on his forward observation post.<sup>169</sup>

Major General Beightler had two options in proceeding down the treacherous highways in northern Luzon. He could either spread his regiments out and seize the high ground along Route 9 or proceed as a column. He decided on the latter approach and eliminated Japanese

---

<sup>167</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, Field Order 19, November 1944.

<sup>168</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 38, pages 5-8.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 10.

pockets as he progressed. Beightler reasoned that the narrow front made more efficient use of the available limited artillery ammunition.<sup>170</sup> As the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment trudged through the mountainous highway, the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment arrived to commence the assault on Baguio. The 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was tasked with eliminating Japanese cave positions, which it did with demolition charges and direct fire from M7 “Priest” 105mm self-propelled guns. However, a precarious turn in the road known as “hairpin turn” had to be seized before the assault could commence. This portion of the road was home to several Japanese machine gun nests and a significant number of riflemen. Eventually the position was taken through combined tank-infantry tactics once several medium tanks arrived. The training on Bougainville saved GI lives once again.

---

<sup>170</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 23, After Action Reports, 37<sup>th</sup> Division, Luzon, November 1, 1944- June 30, 1945, Baguio Campaign.



Steep Terrain of the Cagayan Valley<sup>171</sup>

On April 13, 1945, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commenced its assault on Baguio along with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and Filipino guerrilla regiments. For the next several days all the battalions of the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment rotated in and out of the assault to drive the Japanese back until they reached the Irisan River on April 17. The terrain at this point was highly favorable to the Japanese, as their interlocking machine guns nests were shrouded by dense vegetation. Company B of the 754<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion led the assault and encountered an

---

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

especially deadly banzai attack that seriously wounded Colonel Lawrence White – the most experienced regimental commander in the division.<sup>172</sup>

The Japanese were well aware that retention of the Irian Bridge was their best hope to prevent the American advance. Beightler's offensive to seize the bridge entailed a two pronged attack with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment attacking from the north while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment attacked from the south. The assault also had direct fire support from M-7 and M-18s from the 637<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion bore the brunt of the Japanese defense and Japanese artillery on the high ground shelled the Americans continuously, which reinforced Beightler's decision to proceed with columns in the Cagayan Valley. GIs engaged in hand-to-hand combat against a staunch Japanese resistance that sought to maximize American casualties for each yard advanced. The bloodshed was compounded because American forward observers had difficulty finding the Japanese positions and cave fortifications, which were too strong for indirect artillery to do significant damage to them. This left numerous concealed and fortified Japanese positions untouched. Additionally, the division was running dangerously low on artillery ammunition.

Beightler's response was to greatly increase his use of air support. He did not use much air support on New Georgia and Bougainville – and in Manila it was prohibited. Beightler trusted airstrikes enough that by the end of the Baguio campaign he called strikes in as close as 400 yards to friendly forces.<sup>173</sup> Beightler encouraged pilots to visit the frontlines to understand the struggles of the infantry. As one pilot recalled after seeing his first slain enemy in person, "The

---

<sup>172</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 38, 18.

<sup>173</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 207.

war down here is damn personal, isn't it?"<sup>174</sup> Beightler's ability to adapt to combat conditions saved a significant number of lives and allowed for mission accomplishment as well.

On April 19 a major artillery and aerial bombardment preceded the assault on "Chocolate Drop Hill." The GIs displayed superb small unit tactics and eliminated twenty-five Japanese without a single casualty, thereby securing the high ground.<sup>175</sup> Irian Bridge was seized on April 22, and thus the path to Baguio was open.



M-7 Direct Fire at Baguio<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 39, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., chapter 38, 25.

<sup>176</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 23, After Action Reports, 37<sup>th</sup> Division, Luzon, November 1, 1944 - June 30, 1945.

The 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment replaced the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment as the spearhead down Route 9 towards Baguio. Beightler unleashed a sortie of thirty-six P-51s, in combination with the 155mm guns of the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, to soften Baguio. The city was seized on April 26 along with Trinidad to the north.<sup>177</sup> In early May the 123<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division relieved the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, only to be greeted by the sign, “You are now entering Baguio, courtesy 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.”<sup>178</sup> The 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion’s sign was taken down after a discontented commander expressed his feelings.

The 148<sup>th</sup> and 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments were now in reserve around Trinidad and Baguio; however, the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was still engaged at Mount Pacawagan. The engagement at Mount Pacawagan occurred simultaneously with the push across the Irisan Bridge and into Baguio. Mount Pacawagan was a significant portion of the Japanese “Shimbu line” in the Mariquina Valley. The Americans believed that the position was the most concentrated area of Japanese artillery, as the guns were fired from caves and withdrawn to negate counter-battery fire. Additionally, the Japanese garrison of 4,000 men possessed ample supplies to conduct a lengthy defense. Repeated assaults by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments had failed to take the position, and they subsequently bypassed Mount Pacawagan. However, the fortifications created a salient in the American line and the artillery fire had to be silenced. On April 21, the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment conducted a night offensive on the position. Progress was slow and bloody, but the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions had seized the southwest summit by the afternoon.

In only one day the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment reached the summit of Mt. Pacawagan.<sup>179</sup> However, as the assault continued the progress slowed in debilitating heat and torrential

---

<sup>177</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 38, 33-34.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., chapter 40, 5-7.

downpours. Eventually the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was able to seize nearby Hill 1521 and used bulldozers to make placements to deploy M7 howitzers, which finally offered much needed direct fire support. By May 2, Mount Pacawagan was in American hands, in addition to Mount Binicayan and Sugar Loaf Mountain. The twenty-five day campaign had reduced the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to just 1,566 GIs, with nearly 600 casualties and several companies down to just sixty men. But their victory secured three major mountains, eliminated the Japanese artillery positions, and ensured the protection of Manila's water supplies.<sup>180</sup>

Rest continued to elude the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was ordered to move on Balete Pass under attachment to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The Americans could not move into Cagayan Valley until the pass was seized. The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment relieved the flanks of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division so that it was able to be concentrated directly up Route 5 into the pass. The first offensive action occurred after the repulsion of a Japanese banzai attack, after which the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Howard Schultz attacked Myoko Mountain. After two days the Japanese lines were broken, and Myoko Mountain was in American hands.

From this point the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was reattached to the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and received nearly 500 replacements who had been training with the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in reserve. In the coming days each regiment received at least 600 replacements and the training Beightler immersed them in allowed for successful integration.<sup>181</sup> As Beightler and his men prepared for their advance into Cagayan Valley, they learned of the victory over Germany on

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., chapter 42, 2.

May 8. To the Buckeyes, this was a world away, and the excitement was short lived as there was still a war to be won in the Pacific.

Cagayan Valley was the 260 mile long stronghold of General Yamashita. The Sierra Madre Mountains to the west and Cordillera to the east ran along the Mamparang and Palali ranges to the south. The Cagayan River provided yet another obstacle, although there were some relatively developed roads and towns in the region. Additionally, the Japanese still controlled positions on the high ground in several areas. During one patrol from the Division Artillery Headquarters Battery, Edgar Moorman and his comrades encountered a Japanese force hidden in a cave.<sup>182</sup> The ensuing firefight to destroy the Japanese position became commonplace as American forces skirmished frequently throughout the valley. Yamashita possessed the 101<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, the severely depleted 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, the 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division at the Aparri entrance to the valley, as well as several ad hoc units composed of the remnants from destroyed units.<sup>183</sup> Major General Beightler requested to begin the attack earlier than originally planned to seize the momentum from taking Balete Pass. Lieutenant General Kruger approved this request, which ultimately proved to be an incredibly important decision.

Yamashita's later interrogation revealed that he intended to use two special units to destroy the Magat Bridge behind the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and then attack it with the 10<sup>th</sup>, 103<sup>rd</sup>, and 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>184</sup> However, the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division progressed much faster than Yamashita and his staff believed was possible. He had lost track of the division and believed it was impossible that they were in the Cagayan Valley because their last known location was at Baguio. Yamashita admired Beightler's leadership and

---

<sup>182</sup> Edgar Moorman, Interview conducted by Tyler Webb, Hilliard, Ohio, August 26, 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>184</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 37, "Yamashita's Surrender."



stated, “When I speak of your tactics, I mean your boldness in concentrating your attack on a narrow front using all available fire power to blast a hole for your very aggressive infantry and the extreme effectiveness of the employment of artillery and air power to neutralize any forces on the flanks leaving the infantry free to exploit the advance. The close coordination of your armor and your heavy fire support with the infantry action, together with the most effective employment of close support aircraft that we had experienced, won my admiration and demonstrated the tremendous power of your attack. We weren’t ready for that type of fighting, and you beat us with it.”<sup>185</sup>

A heavily reinforced 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment — with Company C, 775<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion; Company B, 637<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion; the 37<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop; and two platoons from the 85<sup>th</sup> Chemical Battalion – moved through the Balet Pass.<sup>186</sup> The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, with nearly 1,000 recently integrated replacements, and the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment rejoined the division just prior to the first major encounter with the Japanese down the highway. The division progressed swiftly until reaching the outskirts of Solano on June 7, when it encountered significant Japanese anti-tank and artillery positions. The position was especially precarious because the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery lagged behind the infantry because of the regiment’s rapid progress. The 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment suffered several casualties and lost two tanks to hidden 77mm Japanese guns and a 40mm cannon. Once the artillery was able to provide effective counter-battery fire, the Japanese positions were neutralized.

Beightler frequently used P-51s to support the advance as his forces engaged more enemy tanks and heavy artillery. The veterans of the division dreaded every battle at this point, most of

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 42, 3.

them had enough points to rotate home once the war was over. Private First Class Calm Wittebort, from Findlay, Ohio, was one of the very few original infantrymen left; he had 111 points.<sup>187</sup> However, because of the need for manpower and lack of shipping to send men home, he was still fighting in the jungles and mountains of Luzon.

Beightler's strategy again used a column approach to advance through Cagayan Valley. On June 12 the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commenced its assault toward Appari down Route 5, while the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment relieved the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment along Route 4 just north of Bagabag. From this point on the roads turned from reasonably developed to treacherous mountain roads, some barely existing. Also, the division was overextended with vulnerable supply lines. This became blatantly apparent when the Japanese ambushed the 112<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion and inflicted several casualties. By the time Company K from the 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment arrived, the Japanese unit had vanished.<sup>188</sup> The Japanese were still masters of jungle warfare and the American drive down the valley was moving quickly, but on a narrow front. As one news correspondent stated, "the 37<sup>th</sup> Division, racing up the Cagayan Valley, has a front line 200 miles long and 20 yards wide."<sup>189</sup>

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division continued its rapid progress up to Orioung Pass, which Beightler assumed the Japanese would defend. However, the Japanese had only just begun to fortify the position and what could have been another Balete Pass was taken in only three days. The rapid progress of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had surprised the Japanese once again. On June 16 the 145<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, accompanied by an armored reconnaissance unit, captured a

---

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 30.

massive amount of Japanese supplies, including seventeen trucks.<sup>190</sup> The 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment took the lead and several days later reached the south bank of the Cagayan River. Once they crossed a bridge constructed by the 117<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion they stumbled into a strong mechanized Japanese position that consisted of eight tanks and nearly 200 infantry.<sup>191</sup> However, the Americans surprised the Japanese again and the mechanized position was swiftly destroyed.

The repeated inability of the Japanese to stall the American advance at fortified positions was the result of a failure to communicate effectively, a lack of supplies, and a failure to adapt their tactics to American capabilities. Beightler utilized his superior artillery and air power with flexible planning to achieve victory. In late June the 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment contacted the 511<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry on the outskirts of Appari. This meeting was especially important to Beightler because his son, Bob Jr., was a member of the unit.<sup>192</sup> With this link the Cagayan Valley operation was complete. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had progressed 260 miles from Balet Pass to Appari, thus essentially bringing an end to the Luzon campaign.<sup>193</sup> Yamashita best summarized the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's advance in the Cagayan Valley as one in which "no matter what we do, if you decide you are going to get in somewhere, you get there."<sup>194</sup>

### **Peace at Last**

The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division conducted mopping up operations for the duration of the war. The 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment proceeded into the Dummum River Valley region, while the 145<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments pushed into the Sierra Madre Mountains.<sup>195</sup> The morale of the

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>192</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 217.

<sup>193</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 42, 40.

<sup>194</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 5, File 37, "Yamashita's Surrender."

<sup>195</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 43, pages 4-8.

division declined as men with a sufficient number of points to return home continued to risk their lives daily for trivial gains. The monotony of garrison life also plagued the division as the orders of the day consisted of ceremonies, patrols, and parades. However, that all changed on August 10 when the division learned of the impending Japanese surrender, and “hoarded whiskey bottles magically appeared and were rapidly consumed adding extra kick to an already hectic scene.”<sup>196</sup> The Japanese surrender became official on August 15, when a ceasefire was ordered and men on combat patrols rushed back to base with exuberant cheers. The war was finally over.

On September 2, 1945, General Yamashita, commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Area Army, surrendered to American forces on Luzon. Major General Iguchi, commander of the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade, surrendered his sword to Major General Beightler on September 4. The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was set to return home on September 25, although several complications delayed their well-deserved release from war. During this time Beightler had one last innovation left for his men. Each company elected one enlisted man to meet periodically with “the Old Man” to discuss anything and everything they ever had a problem with. This ranged from the lack of Coke products and being able to find a guitar to arguments about who should be heading home. For other soldiers the time was spent mourning those they had lost. Less than one-third of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry “Buckeye” Division at this point had seen any combat with the division.<sup>197</sup> Many of the division veterans had few buddies left from New Georgia and Bougainville – some had none. The officers shared Beightler’s deep bond with the men they commanded. Captain Stanley Frankel captured this bond in his story, “Statistics Don’t Bleed,” in which he thought his mistake

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., chapter 44, 1.

cost six men their lives. He described the feeling of despair as one in which it would have been “better to have a few slugs in the gut than to live with this the rest of our lives.”<sup>198</sup>

Beightler maintained the division’s National Guard and Ohio roots; however, the division at the end of the war was nowhere close to the 44 percent of Ohioans it was on Fiji. Beightler assumed control of the Luzon Area Command until November 15, 1945. All elements of the division were heading back to the United States by November 26, and the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was deactivated on December 18, 1945.<sup>199</sup> The 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division won its victories because of exceptional leadership, innovation, training, use of massed fire support, and courage. The division proved that National Guard units could be effective in combat and had helped the nation achieve victory.

Major General Robert Sprague Beightler’s leadership was the key to the success of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He had relieved incompetent leaders from command, regardless of their ties to Ohio or the National Guard. He had trained his soldiers intensively, both in the United States and overseas. Kruger rated Beightler as superb and one of his best division commanders, but he qualified this by stating “Beightler’s trouble was that he was a damn National Guardsman.”<sup>200</sup> Beightler continued to advocate for the National Guard after the war and oversaw the writing of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division’s history. He fought for the division to receive three battle stars instead of two, because he argued that the New Georgia and Bougainville operations should each be worth one. Beightler wanted his men to receive the recognition they deserved; he was proud of his men and what they had accomplished. Their victory cost the

---

<sup>198</sup> Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 3, File 17, Public Relations Office, feature stories with illustrations, *Statistics Don’t Bleed*.

<sup>199</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 44, 3.

<sup>200</sup> *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*, 245.

Buckeyes 1,094 KIA and 5,960 wounded.<sup>201</sup> Although the Buckeyes never received their third battle star, “the 37<sup>th</sup> Buckeye Division had achieved monumental immortality.”<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Army Battle Casualties and Non-battle Deaths, June 1, 1953, Office of the Adjutant General – Statistical and Accounting Branch.

<sup>202</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 15, chapter 44, 4.

**“It was not a short road, or a straight road, or an easy road. The toll charge for the trip was high. The cost for some was consummate; they never got to see the end of that road. Others paid with an arm or leg or eye or a bit of flesh and blood. For many the price was a set of haunted eyes and a deep, nauseating disgust. In one way or another everyone paid something.”<sup>203</sup>**

---

<sup>203</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, Robert S. Beightler Papers, Box 1, File 10, chapter 12, 21.





### **Bibliography:**

37<sup>th</sup> Division Histories, (*N.D.*), Robert S. Beightler Papers, Ohio Historical Society (Columbus, Ohio).

Andrade, Dale. "Luzon: 1944-1945." October 3, 2003.

Army Battle Casualties and Non-battle Deaths, June 1, 1953, Office of the Adjutant General – Statistical and Accounting Branch.

Edgar Moorman, Interview conducted by Tyler Webb, Hilliard, Ohio, August 26, 2017.

Gerald Shaner, Interview conducted by Tyler Webb, Westerville, Ohio, August 25, 2017.

Gailey, Harry A. *Bougainville, 1943-1945: The Forgotten Campaign*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991.

Ohl, John Kennedy. *Minuteman: The Military Career of General Robert S. Beightler*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

Miller, John. "TOENAILS: The Landings in New Georgia." HyperWar: US Army in WWII: CARTWHEEL--The Reduction of Rabaul. Accessed February 13, 2018.

Miller, John. "Bougainville Counterattack," HyperWar: US Army in WWII: CARTWHEEL--The Reduction of Rabaul. Accessed February 13, 2018.

Loesser, Frank. "Loesser writes for Infantry," *LIFE* magazine, March 5, 1945.

Rentz, John. "Solomon Islands Geography," HyperWar: USMC Monograph--Marines in the Central Solomons. Accessed February 13, 2018.

Malacañan Palace. "Battle of Manila." Malacanang. Accessed February 13, 2018.

Miller, Edward S. *War Plan Orange: the US strategy to defeat Japan, 1897-1945*. Annapolis: Md., 2007.

Murray, Williamson, and Millett, Allan R. *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.

Spector, Ronald H. *Eagle Against the Sun: the American War with Japan*. Riverside: Free Press, 2012.